

THE FABELMANS

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&

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1

EXT. THE FOX THEATER, PHILADELPHIA - NIGHT

1

It's winter. A line of people wraps around the red brick walls of the theater, thick clouds of breath (like horses') in the freezing air.

SCREEN TITLE: **JANUARY 10, 1952**

SCREEN TITLE: **NEW JERSEY**

BURT'S VOICE (O.S.)
Mommy and Daddy will be right next to you. The lights will go down. There may be some organ music as the curtain opens --

The camera goes down the line till, near the rear, it reaches SAMMY FABELMAN, 6 years old. His eyes are wide, his mouth is drawn downwards, he looks very scared, on the verge of tears. A man's voice says:

BURT'S VOICE (CONT'D)
Don't be scared.

SAMMY
It'll be dark in there! You said!

BURT FABELMAN, 37, an engineer, bespectacled, sport jacket and tie, looks down at Sammy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
I don't wanna go in!

BURT
But it's fun. All week you've been so excited - your first-ever movie!

SAMMY
And the people are gigantic!

BURT
What people?

SAMMY
You said the people in the movie are gigantic.

BURT
No, because of the big screen they're on. But they're not real.
(to Mitzi:)
Right?

Sammy looks up at his mom.

MITZI'S VOICE (O.S.)
They're like dreams.

SAMMY
Dreams are scary!

His mother's gloved hand gently caresses his cheek.

MITZI
Some dreams are, but this is gonna
be a nice dream, about a circus,
and clowns and acrobats and, um -

BURT
You wanna know how it works?
There's a big machine called a
projector, inside there's a big
bright light and it projects
photographs of, of clowns and
acrobats -

MITZI
And elephants and, um...
happy things!

BURT (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Projecting means it sends
them out - Happy things... -
like light from a huge
flashlight.

BURT (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
These photographs move past the
light really fast - 24 photos in
every second! - Now in your brain
each photograph stays for about a
fifteenth of a second.

Sammy listens, but he still looks scared.

BURT (CONT'D)
That's called persistence of
vision. The photographs move past
faster than your brain can let go
of them. And that's how the movie
projector tricks us into believing
that motionless pictures are moving
- a motion picture!

Sammy, baffled, is gently turned by the gloved hand to face -

MITZI FABELMAN, 33, short blonde hair, her own inventive,
quirky sense of style. She crouches down to his level and
turns the full force of her charm on him.

MITZI

Movies are dreams, dolly, that you never forget. You just wait and see, when it's over, you're gonna have the biggest sloppiest smile on your face.

Sammy's anxiety starts to give way. Burt's moved by this, Mitzi's way with Sammy, Sammy's complete trust in her. The line starts moving.

BURT

They're letting us in.

Mitzi looks up at Burt; he winks at her. Mitzi looks at Sammy, raising an eyebrow: "Are we going in?" Sammy nods, giving her his permission. Mitzi stands, holding Sammy's hand. As the line moves and the Fabelmans approach the entrance, the camera lifts up to the marquee - Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show On Earth*.

2

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH, FOX THEATER - NIGHT

2

The projector's an aggressive monster, huge reels spinning, film running through gears, passing through the gate, image by image, past the brilliant bulb, out through the lens and into...

INT. FOX THEATER AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The movie palace's opulent auditorium is filled to its 1200-seat capacity. On the screen, the robbery in the train, Cornell Wilde and Betty Hutton.

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN)

Wait'll the engines pass!

ON SCREEN

TWO ROBBERS leap from a car parked next to the railroad tracks and clamber aboard a circus train as it grinds to a stop. Robber 1 dons a bandanna mask and smashes a window with his pistol.

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN)

Open up the door!

An ENGINEER emerges to investigate and gets cold cocked by Robber 2.

IN THE THEATER

The audience GASPS. Mitzi checks on Sammy with a quick glance. Sammy, eyes wide, is completely entranced, consumed, absorbed watching as...

ON SCREEN

... The car is pulled up to straddle the train tracks.

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN)
What's that?

ANOTHER TRAIN speeds towards them on the same tracks.

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN)
Second section!

Robber 2 pales. His sweetheart's on the stalled train behind the car, the train they've just robbed.

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
Get goin! We gotta burn rubber!

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN)
Angel! She's on that train!

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN)
So what? We got the dough, let's
get outta here.

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN)
Lights! I must turn the lights down
the track!

He starts to pull the car onto the tracks towards the oncoming train.

ROBBER 1 (ON SCREEN)
You crazy lug, gimme that wheel -

He lunges towards the steering wheel and Robber 2 punches him, then clubs him. The theater crowd GASPS again.

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN)
Stop the train! STOP THE TRAIN!!!

He drives the car down the tracks right at the oncoming train, flashing the headlights.

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN) (CONT'D)
STOP! CAN'T YOU SEE THE LIGHTS?!?!
STOP!!!

IN THE THEATER

Sammy's eyes go wide!

ON SCREEN

The Engineer in the second train tries to slow down.

ENGINEER (ON SCREEN)
(to his BRAKEMAN)
Hang on!

ROBBER 2 (ON SCREEN)
Angel! ANGEL!!!

But it's too late. The train hits the car and flips it over!

IN THE THEATER

Sammy's whole body goes rigid, pushing back into his seat, staring in shock at the catastrophe on the screen.

Cut between the crash as the moving train ploughs into the stalled train and Sammy's reactions, frozen stills of his sheer, visceral terror (cf 2001's star gate sequence). For Sammy this is real, not a movie. His eyes are huge, taking in danger on the screen: lions and tigers are escaping from the demolished train!

Above and behind him, the projector's beam's colors cross, dance in the thick, cigarette-smoke-filled air. The beam's colors blend and merge into...

3 INT/EXT - THE FABELMAN CAR DRIVING THROUGH HADDON HEIGHTS, 3
NEW JERSEY

... the colors of Christmas lights festooning every house on the street. Sammy's in the car's front seat between his parents, visibly stricken with fear.

MITZI
What was your favorite part?

Sammy's too scared to talk.

MITZI (CONT'D)
Sammy! What do you want for Hanukkah?

Sammy doesn't answer. Mitzi looks at Burt.

BURT

I told you this wasn't a good idea,
what with all his a-n-x-i-e-t-i-e-
s.

MITZI

Kids his age have big i-m-a-g-i-n-a-
t-i-o-n-s.

SAMMY

No fair spelling out the long
words!

Burt turns onto Crystal Terrace Avenue, resplendent with
Christmas lights. He squints.

BURT

The lights change how everything
looks. It's hard to find our house.

SAMMY

(to Burt:)

Ours is the dark house with no
lights.

Mitzi laughs.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

That's what I want for Hanukkah.

MITZI

What?

SAMMY

Christmas Lights.

Mitzi laughs again. Burt shakes his head.

MITZI

Sorry Dolly, Jews don't get
Christmas lights.

BURT

Eight nights of candlelight.
(singing the penultimate
line, setting her up:)
"Who could ask for anything
more..."

As the car pulls into the driveway of the neighborhood's only
dark house.

MITZI
(big finish:)
"Who could ask for anything more!!"

Burt leans over Sammy and gives Mitzi a big romantic kiss. Sammy watches, delighted and horrified. Then:

SAMMY
Can I sleep with the oscilloscope?

4

CUT TO: 4

CU on Burt's oscilloscope, its sign wave waving, filling Sammy's darkened bedroom with an eerie pulsating green glow that's having a narcotizing effect on Sammy, in bed, fighting but succumbing to sleep. His eyes flutter and close.

5

CUT BACK TO: 5

6

CU on the oscilloscope's round screen. Superimposed over its fluctuating green sign wave: A wild jumble of sounds from *The Greatest Show On Earth*. The tempo of the oscilloscope's wave fluctuations increase, getting frantic at the sound of the car being driven onto the train tracks, the driver shouting frantically. Suddenly flashing to the image as the train flips the car and collides with the other train:

INT. THE FABLEMAN HOUSE, HADDON HEIGHTS - HALL - NIGHT

SAMMY (O.S.)
MOOOOOOMMMMMMMYYY!! MOMMMMMYYY!

Mitzi in her nightgown rushes to Sammy's room, still half asleep.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She swings open the door to find Sammy jumping on his bed.

SAMMY
I know what I want for Hanukkah! I
know what I want for Hanukkah!

7

INT. THE FABELMAN HOUSE, HADDON HEIGHTS - NIGHT

7

A Hanukkiach with one candle; the shamos candle, held by REGGIE, Sammy's 4 year old sister, is brought slowly, carefully to light it.

FABELMAN FAMILY
[Hebrew prayer TBD]

The entire family shares in the prayer, including both of Sammy's younger sisters and both grandmothers: maternal grandmother TINA SCHILDKRAUT, 63, beaming with joy and love; and paternal grandmother HADASSAH FABELMAN, 66, a tall, formidable Ukranian.

They finish with a collective joyous "HANNUKAH!" as the sisters excitedly grab their presents and tear into them.

REGGIE

Thank you!

Burt quietly hands Sammy his own gift.

BURT

Sammy...

Sammy's fingers tear open his gift: Lionel electric train tracks!

INT. FABELMAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

A big piano fanfare, with Mitzi at the keys as the family sings together. Hadassah is knitting small squares, which she'll stitch together someday to make an afghan. Burt films with a wind-up Kodak Brownie 8mm camera; bright lights on a stand overexpose the room, all around which are TV sets Burt's repairing. Burt closes in on Mitzi as she sings:

MITZI

Down by the station, early in the
morning,
See the little pufferbellies all in
a row,
See the station master pull the
little handle!

EVERYONE

PUFF PUFF TOOT TOOT OFF THEY GO!

Mitzi's playing continues through:

8

CUT TO: 8

On each Hanukkah night, another candle, and Sammy opens another present. On the second night, a caboose; on the third night, a passenger car; night 4) a boxcar; 5) another passenger car; 6) a crossing gate; 7) a transformer; and finally, 8), the coal car and engine!

9

INT. THE FABELMAN GARAGE - NIGHT

9

The garage is Burt's work-station: TV sets undergoing repairs; on a workbench, tools and ham radio equipment.

Burt hunkers down next to Sammy and places the locomotive in front of the other cars on the completed tracks, mounted on a green-painted plywood board.

BURT

...so the outside grounds, the middle conducts the power, and these two metal wheels under the engine complete the circuit.

The two grandmothers and Mitzi enter as Burt carefully connects the engine to the train.

HADASSAH

(to Burt:)

So nu, Mr. Engineer, RCA gave you a raise? That is one expensive trolley car.

SAMMY

(indignant!)
It's not a trolley car it's a Lionel train!

BURT

No raises for the computer guys this year. Next year maybe.

MITZI

Your moonlighting son is paying for it by filling up my house with broken TVs. Repair work. That's how.

Sammy moves to the transformer, sending Hadassah lunging for Burt.

HADASSAH

Oy! Careful he doesn't electrocute himself.

Sammy looks at Burt, momentary alarmed. Tina gets down on the floor with Sammy as Burt says to Hadassah:

BURT

Ne pugay mal'chika. (Don't scare the boy.)
(to Sammy)
You're okay.

TINA

Hold on, you're not taking that fancy train to Florida without me!!
*
*

HADASSAH

She's down on the floor. Who's gonna help her up?

TINA

Who says I'm getting up! I'm going
to Miami on the Sammy Limited!!
(to Sammy)
Go 'head.

Reassured, Sammy turns the transformer knob. The train moves. Everyone claps, oohs and aahs. Reggie and Natalie rush in, thrilled by the spectacle.

Sammy kneels to bring himself eye level to the tracks. From his new perspective, the approaching train looks life-size, getting bigger as it races towards him. In his mind, the clickety-clack of a toy train is replaced by the deafening roar of a steam locomotive. When the train reaches him, Sammy flinches, breaking the illusion - which fascinates him.

10 EXT. THE FABELMAN HOUSE - NIGHT 10

Surrounded by houses ablaze with Christmas lights, the Fabelman house is the black hole of Crystal Terrace Avenue.

12 INT. THE GARAGE - NIGHT 12

Sammy's hand places a toy convertible car on the tracks, facing the train. He wedges a small wooden figure of Noah in the driver's seat.

Flashlight in hand, Sammy's turns the transformer dial.

The train starts to move towards the car, which Sammy's hand is moving towards the train; then we see Sammy's face, level with the plywood, trying to get the correct perspective.

The locomotive picks up speed. CU of smokestack pumping smoke. The toy car barrels toward the train. CU of Noah's face, caught in the train's headlight.

Sammy holds his breath, watching the train and car heading at one another; the sound is again in Sammy's head, VERY LOUD AND REAL! Then...

CRASH!!!! The car hits the train! In SLOW MOTION, it does exactly what it's supposed to do: It flips up and over the train, just like in the movie! Noah flies out of the car! Sammy in the background traces with his eyes Noah's arc through the air, and then...

At normal speed, Sammy snaps his gaze to the train, rushing straight at Noah's model Ark, placed on the tracks, tilted to make sure it'll be derailed when...

CRASH AGAIN!!! In SLOW MOTION, the train slams into the ark! The cars accordion into V-shaped towers as the ark topples heavily onto its side, its roof popping off and its animals, dozens of pairs, tumble and scatter across the floor.

Sammy, startled, pulls away from the tracks, jarring Burt's work table, causing a shelf of tools near the edge of the table to fall to the cement floor, making a mighty racket.

13 INT. BURT AND MITZI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 13

The sound of the falling tools startle Burt and Mitzi out of deep sleep. They sit up in bed.

14 INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 14

Sammy is in bed, Mitzi tucking him in. He's watching Burt, who sits on the edge of the bed, carefully straightening a bent coupler on one of the train's cars with a needle-nose pliers.

BURT

They're precisely engineered toys.
You can play with them when you've
learned to treat them with respect.

SAMMY

I do respect them! I love them!

BURT

I know you do, but you can't just
love something, you also have to
take care of it, right?

He rises, but pauses in the doorway.

BURT (CONT'D)

Maybe we can play together with
them this weekend.

He leaves with the mended train car.

SAMMY

(turning to his mom:)
But I need to see them crash.

Mitzi looks at him, understanding something.

14A INT. AND BURT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

14A

Mitzi and Burt are back in bed. Burt is still working on the train's coupling. Mitzi is reading and marking the piano score for the Goldberg Variations.

BURT

I don't understand. Why does he
need to see them crash?

He looks at Mitzi. She shrugs, studying her score. Burt goes back to the train, then he shows Mitzi: The two train cars couple. She cheers quietly. Burt puts the cars on the nightstand. He's about to take off his glasses and settle down to sleep when he stops because she's still reading her score.

BURT (CONT'D)

It's late. You don't wanna shut
your light?

MITZI

In a minute, I'm still wide awake.
(showing him the score,
open to Variation #21:)
See these descending notes?
That's called a lament bass.
(singing the opening
notes, tapping each with
her blue pencil:)
Ya da da dee dah dah dah dah...

BURT

You should play it on the radio. On
that arts program, they keep asking
you to come back.

MITZI

I don't have the time for that.

BURT

We can hire a sitter.

MITZI

Who can afford that? Forget it.
That was another life, that was two
kids ago.

Burt switches off his light. She looks up from the score.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Know what I miss most about the
piano? Surrendering to the score,
knowing Bach is gonna tell you how:

First this note then this chord
 then you open your hand, you
 stretch down an octave, and...
 (she sings the notes of
 the lament bass, playing
 them with her fingers)
 Making a little world you can be
 safe and happy in.

Burt kisses Mitzi's hand and lies back. She takes off his
 glasses and he smiles with his eyes closed.

BURT

Thank you...

Mitzi places them on the nightstand, next to the train cars.
 Mitzi stares at the glasses and the trains.

MITZI

That's why he needs to watch them
 crash. He's trying to get some kind
 of...control over it.

Mitzi's eyes stay on the train cars. An idea is forming.

15

INT. THE GARAGE OF THE FABELMAN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

15

Reflected in the broken TV screens, Sammy sets up his shot,
 placing the train, the toy car driven by Noah and the tilted
 ark on the tracks. Mitzi enters with Burt's movie camera.
 She smiles at him, his complete absorption in the task.

MITZI

Sammy? We're going to use Daddy's
 camera to film it. Only crash the
 train once, OK? Then after we get
 the film developed, you can watch
 it crash over and over till it's
 not so scary anymore. And your real
 train won't ever get broken.

Sammy rises eagerly to take the camera, but Mitzi holds onto
 it as she kneels before him.

MITZI (CONT'D)

One other thing, Dolly... Let's not
 tell your father. It'll be our
 secret movie, just yours and mine.
 (with a wink:)
 Okay?

SAMMY

Okay.

16

INT. THE FABELMAN HOUSE - EVENING

16

Burt bursts through the front door carrying a TV set. As he heads to the kitchen:

BURT

Sorry I'm late! I picked up Mrs. Moynahan's Motorola. There's no room left in the workshop. Where should I put it?

MITZI

The living room, I guess.

Burt staggers away with the TV set. Right behind him, Hadassah, struggling to get free, clutching her huge knitting bag, is being carried in by BENNIE LOEWY, 35, Burt's work associate and friend, working-class, balding, heavysset, cherubic face, sweet smile, mischievous twinkle.

BENNIE

(calling into the kitchen:)

Hey, sorry I'm late, I picked up Mrs. Fabelman. Where should I put her?

HADASSAH

Otpusti menya, kayzol, tebe shto, nyeh stiidno?!

(Put me down you big goatish lump, you should be ashamed!)

Hadassah grabs Bennie's ear and twists, HARD, forcing him to put her down.

BENNIE

OWWWW!!!! OW OW OW!

Sammy rushes through the door, past the pair, and straight to the kitchen, where Mitzi's got a huge meal going: pots on the stove, a brisket and a casserole in the oven. She's turning the crank of a large metal grinder, making chopped chicken liver.

SAMMY

Did the mail come?!?

MITZI

(to Sammy:)
It's on the table.

Sammy runs to the dining table and rifles through the mail. Hadassah finally extricates herself from Bennie.

HADASSAH

Cossack.

She enters the kitchen with a bag of knitting supplies. After a brief, silent stare down with Mitzi, she crosses to open the oven.

HADASSAH (CONT'D)

This is brisket?

In the dining room, Sammy happily snatches a box of processed Kodak film from Bennie.

SAMMY

MY MOVIE!

MITZI

Ah ah ah! After supper.

She plucks the film from his hands and puts the film box in her apron pocket.

18

CUT TO: 18

Burt, Bennie, Mitzi, Reggie, Sammy, Natalie and Hadassah, still visiting, are eating Mitzi's superabundant shabbos meal. The plates, the tablecloth, the napkins are paper; the flatware and cups are plastic. Bennie is seated between Natalie and Burt. Two candles are burning and there's a challah:

BURT

The amount of magnetism is increased by how magnetically permeable the core material is. The tricky thing is how permeable -

BENNIE

Right, though eddy currents can cause energy loss, it's -

MITZI

Am I supposed to be following any of this?

BURT

(to Mitzi:)

You know what a magnetic field is, right?

MITZI

Well, sure, I mean - Sammy, do you know what a magnetic field is?

SAMMY

Can I be excused?

BURT

Nope.

SAMMY

But I need to, just for a minute?!

BURT

What's so urgent?

HADASSAH

(to Burt:)

Honey. This tastes funny, Burt. It tastes funny on a plastic fork.

BURT

Mom...

HADASSAH

Is she saving the silverware for when the Eisenhowers drop by?

BURT

(to Mitzi:)

The problem is we're using vacuum tubes, not transistors, and magnetic cores to access -

BENNIE

35,000 magnetic cores!

(to Sammy:)

Hey, Sam, you know how on your father's camera, when the film runs out?

Sammy is instantly interested.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

When that happens what do you do?

SAMMY

(With authority, even a little condescension because it's so obvious:)

Load more film?

BENNIE

The same with computers, you have to load more tape, and that slows everything down.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>BENNIE (CONT'D) *</p> <p>But we've figured out how to * take a whole bunch of tapes loaded with data -</p> | <p>BURT</p> <p>Mitts, the chopped liver was beyond belief.</p> |
|---|--|

Mitzi shushes Burt with a gesture, focused on Bennie.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

- and instead of changing tapes
every ten seconds, this new machine
he's engineering -

He points to Reggie, who eagerly leaps up for her cue.

REGGIE

The BIZMAC!

BENNIE

The Bizmac! It can search for
information through all these tapes
at once. You never need to change
any of 'em! It'll be ten times
faster!

Mitzi takes Burt's hand and says to Bennie:

MITZI

I love Burt's brain, especially
when you're around to explain
what's in it.

Hadassah looks up from her plate, fixing Mitzi, then Bennie
with a look.

SAMMY

Mom!! I have to go upstairs now!

BURT

Not until you've finish eating.

MITZI

He cleaned his plate.

NATALIE

No he didn't!

Natalie picks up Sammy's plate, revealing that he's hidden
almost all his food in a semi-circle under the rim.

BURT

Sammy.

Burt's about to scold Sammy, who's staring daggers at
Natalie, when Bennie jumps in.

BENNIE

Hey Natalie, I think there's something under *your* plate!

NATALIE

No there isn't!

Mitzi quietly crooks a finger to summon her son.

MITZI

Sammy.

BENNIE

(to Natalie)

Lift it up and check! I saw it moving.

Natalie lifts her plate. There's a big black spider underneath. She screams!!

Bennie snatches the spider and pops it in his mouth and chews. Natalie screams again, and Reggie joins her.

While the girls scream at Bennie's antics, Mitzi takes the film from her apron pocket and slips it to Sammy, who runs out.

Bennie chews; grinning, mouth full, he says, a la Spencer Tracy in *Adam's Rib*:

BENNIE (CONT'D)

Licorice! If there's anything I'm a sucker for it's licorice.

Everyone bursts out laughing.

NATALIE

Uncle Bennie, that was sooooo disgusting!! So gross!

HADASSAH

Natalie! He is not your uncle.
(to Mitzi, pointedly:)
Also he is not that funny.

MITZI

(as she tries to get control of her laughing:)
Uncle is a term of affection.

Hadassah grunts, then resumes eating. Mitzi, still giggling, starts clearing the food, leaving the paper- and plastic-ware on the table.

HADASSAH

Natalie, he's not related. He's only always here because he works for my son.

BURT

He's only always here because he's my best friend.

BENNIE

And deep down inside you, Mrs. Fabelman, admit it: I'm your friend too.

HADASSAH

Deep down inside of me is none of your business.

Hadassah goes back to eating.

MITZI

Sid Caesar's on at 8!
(to Reggie and Natalie:)
Help me.

Hadassah knows what's coming; she lifts up her plate and keeps eating. Meanwhile the girls jump up and grab two ends of the paper tablecloth, while Mitzi grabs an end, then gestures to Bennie to do likewise. He does.

BURT

Natalie, get that corner.

BENNIE

Get the corner! Get the corner!!

REGGIE

Can I help you take it out?

The girls, Mitzi and Bennie bring the four ends of the tablecloth together, enfolding the plates, cups, plasticware within.

CU the Kodak film spooling through the projector, light streaming through the lens, and played out on the "screen" of Sammy's palms, the footage of the Lionel train wreck. Sammy watches wide-eyed.

19 INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM, HADDON HEIGHTS - SAME 19

Mitzi enters. The room's dark. Sammy is nowhere in sight.

She hears a whirring noise, sees the closet, the door of which is closed. From under the closet door, a bluish flickering light.

Mitzi knocks gently.

MITZI

Sammy?

19 INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM CLOSET, HADDON HEIGHTS - EVENING 19

The door opens. Without a word, Sammy reaches up and takes Mitzi's hand, pulling her in. She smiles, confused.

MITZI

What?

Moments later, ensconced in darkness, Sammy, seated on the floor by Mitzi, turns on the projector.

On the closet wall ahead of them, an 8"X10" rectangle of light appears, and Sammy's train crash movie starts to play.

First the train, rounding the bend and passing the camera.

Then there's a flash of light. Then we see the Ark on the tracks with the car in front of it. Sammy's fingers make Noah climb into the car.

Another flash. The train is coming right at the lens, its light getting brighter and brighter. Then another flash.

Mitzi is unable to take her eyes off the film. The car, driven by Noah, is coming right at the lens of the camera.

Another flash of light, then a side angle as the train smashes into the car. The car flips up and Noah goes flying! Another flash, then the camera itself is speeding towards the ark! Another flash, and the train is heading straight at the lens! It collides into the camera! Mitzi gasps! Sammy takes her arm and watches her closely, seeking her approval.

Another flash of light, then Mitzi, spellbound, watches the train crash into the ark, the trains accordion and uncouple; another flash and the ark falls over and the animals inside fly out towards the camera. Mitzi gasps again.

SAMMY

I had to crash it a whole lot of times but the train never got hurt.

The end of the film flaps past the gate. The projector lights up the whole closet. Mitzi stares at Sammy.

MITZI

Oh Dolly! That was the greatest show on earth!

Sammy looks back at her, an oddly serious expression on his face.

MITZI (CONT'D)

More! More! More! More! More!

Sammy grins hugely.

20

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

20

Reggie steps into frame in a dentist smock made of one of Burt's shirts on backwards, Mitzi's makeup mirror taped to her forehead, in Groucho glasses, a fat bubblegum cigar in her teeth.

Natalie is her patient in a folding chair, feet up on a stack of Encyclopedias, a napkin tucked into her collar. Sammy grabs her chin and adjusts her position.

SAMMY

Head back. Open. Candy corn in.

NATALIE

Ahhhhh.

Reggie shoves a spoonful of candy corn into Natalie's mouth. Sammy loads another spoon with ketchup.

Reggie hops in giddy anticipation, a piece of candy corn already loaded in her pliers.

SAMMY

(to Natalie:)

Say "ah". Head back. Ketchup.
'Kay... Scream like it hurts.

He grabs the camera and starts filming as Reggie shoves a pair of pliers in Natalie's open mouth to yank her "tooth".

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Pull it!

A20 INT. THE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON A20

Mitzi, seated at the upright piano, opens a book of The Goldberg Variations. She finds the one she's looking for, positions her hands above the keys, readies herself and, just as she's about to play: she's nearly knocked off the bench by Natalie SCREAMING A BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM upstairs!!

20 INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - AFTERNOON 20

The door flies and Mitzi charges in, agog with terror, just as Natalie spews a gory spray of candy corn teeth and ketchup-blood all over Reggie's dentist's smock. All while Sammy films. Mitzi is equally shocked and amused.

MITZI

Sammy!

21 INT. NATALIE AND REGGIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 21

A giggling Reggie lies on the floor, wrapped in strips of torn-up bedsheets from the neck down. Sammy wraps her face and hands in toilet paper, which Natalie feeds to him from an immense pile of unspooled toilet paper.

Sammy soaks Reggie's tissue-wrapped face and hands with a squirt gun, producing the effect of hideously wrinkled flesh that, to Sammy's evident satisfaction, resembles Boris Karloff's in The Mummy!

Reggie opens her eyes, raises her arms, stiff and perpendicular, and growls, teeth bared:

REGGIE

GRRRRRRR!!!

Standing on the bed, an already "mummified" Natalie howls with her sister.

CUT TO:

22 INT. MITZI AND BURT'S BATHROOM - AFTERNOON 22

Mitzi reaches to get some toilet paper. The roll is empty. She reaches behind her head for the spare and finds another empty roll.

CUT BACK TO:

22A INT. FABELMAN KITCHEN - SAME 22A

Dramatically backlit by a big flashlight, Mummified Reggie and Natalie, arms raised and growling ferociously, lurch towards Sammy's camera. He moves backwards, several steps ahead of them, moving his camera side-to-side to augment The Mummies' lurching.

22 INT. MITZI AND BURT'S BATHROOM - AFTERNOON 22

Mitzi looks to the shelf above the toilet and finds a multitude of empty cardboard toilet-paper tubes.

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Reggie and Natalie are blindfolded with handkerchiefs as Sammy guides them into his room, darkened by drapes. He stands them before his open closet. Inside, a bright light shines out from a spinning color wheel, seated next to Sammy's camera. He gets into the closet, grabbing the camera and a rope.

SAMMY

Take off the blindfolds.

As the girls remove the handkerchiefs, Sammy pulls the rope, causing a ghoulish model skeleton to come lunging out from between the hanging clothes. Reggie and Natalie SCREAM!

27 INT. FABELMAN HOUSE - AFTERNOON 27

Mitzi comes to the bottom of the stairs, one hand holding a baby bottle, the other supporting new baby LISA, 5 months old, on her hip. She calls upstairs.

SCREEN TITLE: **THE FOLLOWING YEAR**

MITZI

SAMMMMMY!!!

(a beat, then:)

REGGIE!!! NATALIE!!! COME

DOWNSTAIRS PRONTO!! YOUR FATHER HAS
AN ANNOUNCEMENT!!!

28 CUT TO: 28

INT. FABELMAN LIVING ROOM - SAME

The kids are seated on the sofa in the living room. Mitzi sits with them, feeding baby LISA, 5 months old, from a

bottle. Burt stands, a nervous grin on his face. Behind him, TV sets waiting to be repaired.

BURT

General Electric wants to hire me,
because of what I did on Bizmac.

The kids - Sammy, now 8, Natalie, now 5, and Reggie, now 6 -
listen raptly.

BURT (CONT'D)

They want to use my electronic
library system to - I don't think
they have any notion what I can do
with it! And I'll make more money!

REGGIE

Is uncle Bennie coming too?

MITZI

Well, Daddy and me hadn't had
a chance to -

BURT

(surprised, bemused:)
Bennie? No, he lives here -

MITZI (CONT'D)

Burt?

Taken by surprise, maybe even a little nettled, Burt looks at
Mitzi, waiting for an answer. Realizing he needs to address
the issue:

BURT

Uh... I'll miss your Uncle Bennie,
too.

Then, as if nothing's happened, he resumes with the kids:

BURT (CONT'D)

But Phoenix is a real neat city.
It's on the rise!

30

INT. THE FABELMAN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

30

BANG! The door of Mitzi and Burt's bedroom flies open and
Mitzi storms out. As Mitzi descends the stairs, Burt follows
her, arguing:

BURT

They only just hired me, I've got
no pull there yet. I can't ask
General Electric to hire somebody
else on my say-so, that's not how
it works.

MITZI

Don't ask them, do it yourself.
They're hiring you to manage.
Managers hire. Hire Bennie.

Mitzi reaches the first floor. She sees baby Lisa neglected in her bassinet. Sammy and his sisters are gathered at the front window.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Who's watching --? Sammy!

Mitzi pulls the now-crying Lisa into her arms as Burt continues to plead his case.

BURT

He's gotta make a name for himself
at RCA, that's what I did. He'll
stay in New Jersey, get out from
under my shadow, and then he can -

MITZI

He needs you, Burt. He's -

SAMMY (O.S.)

There's a tornado outside!!

MITZI

Yeah? Well, there's a bigger one in
here!

(turning on Burt:)

Honestly, honestly Burt sometimes I
wanna shake you. You - You're gonna
leave him behind with just a, a
shrug?

Reggie grabs Mitzi's arm to pull her towards the window.

MITZI (CONT'D)

See you later?! Once we're
gone, who'll he have left in
New Jersey? You have an
opportunity to help your best
friend! Honestly!! *Wake up.*

KIDS

Mommy! Mommy, look! Mom!
Mommy! Look!

The kids' insistent cries finally snap Mitzi around to them.

MITZI (CONT'D)

WHAT?

NATALIE

Look! There's a tornado outside!
I'm scared!

31 EXT. OUTSIDE THE FABELMAN HOUSE - AFTERNOON

31

Mitzi opens the front door and emerges with Lisa in her arms. It's wildly windy and very dark.

MITZI
(laughing)
Wow... Oh...

Mitzi, holding Lisa, stands in the street, looking at a funnel cloud forming, several miles away. The kids and Burt come out onto the front porch.

MITZI (CONT'D)
You weren't kidding!

REGGIE
How close is it? Why does the sky
look -

Mitzi, a little wild, hands Lisa to Burt. As the baby starts to fuss, she gathers the other kids.

MITZI
Come on! Come on, let's go see!

She hustles the kids into the car. Burt trails her across the yard, still holding Lisa, puzzled.

BURT
Mitts? Where are you going?!
MITTS! Where are... Hey?!

Burt watches as the car starts, then begins to back up, faster than it should. Inside are the three kids, and Mitzi at the wheel. Burt walks towards the car.

BURT (CONT'D)
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!

The car tears off, leaving Burt and Lisa behind in the cul de sac.

BURT (CONT'D)
MITTS! MITZI!!!

INT./EXT. THE STREETS OF HADDON HEIGHTS - AFTERNOON

Sammy, Reggie, and Natalie lean forward from the back seat, craning to see through the front window. Outside, high winds, small branches from trees littering the street, and rain.

Some cars pull over and Mitzi swerves around them, causing other drivers to honk.

REGGIE

Where is it, I can't see it anymore-

MITZI

Up ahead somewhere, we'll find it.

SAMMY

(pointing)

Mom, it's there! It's there!!

Up ahead, the funnel cloud reappears, moving from left to right. Cars have begun to pull to the right and left sides of the street.

Mitzi accelerates and drives straight up the middle of the street, now empty of traffic. Sammy sees that the traffic lights are swinging wildly from side to side.

A couple of telephone poles begin to rock back and forth.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Is this s-safe?

MITZI

(laughing:)

Of course it's safe! I'm your mother!

A transformer box on one of the poles blows with a bang and a shower of sparks. The children SCREAM.

KIDS

STOP! STOP!!

Mitzi slams on the brakes, pulling up short at an intersection. Rain pours down and the rising wind drives a fleet of abandoned shopping carts down the cross street. It's a sobering sight for Mitzi.

The kids slump back, relieved. Mitzi seems to realize how irrational she is being. She puts her head on the wheel, calming herself.

MITZI

(softly, hesitantly)

Everything happens for a reason.

Everything happens for a reason.

Everything happens for a reason.

(terrified, asking the kids for support:)

Say it with me! Everything happens
for a reason!

SAMMY, REGGIE, NATALIE AND MITZI
Everything happens for a reason!

As Mitzi and the girls repeat this, Sammy falls silent; he
stares out the window, puzzled and apprehensive.

REGGIE, NATALIE AND MITZI
Everything happens for a reason!

Over this: The Sons Of The Pioneers recording of Tim
Spencer's "By A Campfire On The Trail."

33

EXT. THE ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

33

The song continues over a Plymouth Electra station wagon
driving past cactuses and tumbleweeds.

SCREEN TITLE: **ARIZONA**

In the rear window, Sammy is anxiously watching the desert,
alert for signs of danger; in his hands, the 8MM camera.

REGGIE (O.S.)
I think there's something dead in
the road.

Sammy snaps to attention as the car passes, on the side of
the road, a dead armadillo, hugely swollen, flies buzzing
around it. With grim satisfaction that his worst expectations
of this hellish place have been confirmed, he raises the
camera and films the roadkill. Then he films his fellow
passengers.

SAMMY
Reggie, wave to the camera.

34

CUT TO: 34

8MM FILM, grainy, jumpy, overexposed. Reggie looks out the
right rear passenger window; she turns to make a horrible
face at the camera. Natalie pops up next to her, facing the
camera; she brings her mouth right up to the camera's lens
and breathes, fogging it up. Sammy's hand grabs her by the
shirt, pulls her up to the lens and uses her shirt to wipe it
clean. There's no sound, but Sammy's called to Burt, who
waves, eyes on the road. Mitzi turns from the front passenger
seat, and waves. The camera moves to the right-side seat
behind Mitzi, occupied by: BENNIE! He waves, mouthing "Hi,

Sammy", then raises his tiny Minox camera and takes a photograph of Sammy filming him. (END OF 8MM)

35

CUT TO: 35

Frankie's still singing. Camelback Mountain looms over sprawling suburb, which a "For Sale" sign on the lawn identifies as **ORANGE BLOSSOM ESTATES**. The station wagon starts to pull into the driveway of a one-story house.

MITZI (O.S.)

Ooo, look! There it is!

BENNIE (O.S.)

It is!

The kids CHEER.

SAMMY (O.S.)

Lemme out, I want to take a shot of you pulling in!

NATALIE (O.S.)

REGGIE (O.S.)

NO!! I HAVE TO PEE!! NO NO!! Me too!

The car stops. Sammy jumps out, runs ahead. Reggie and Natalie stick their heads out the window.

NATALIE AND REGGIE

NO. I. HAVE. TO. PEE.

Sammy ignores them, frames his shot then gives Burt the go-ahead.

SAMMY

Keep coming... Keep coming, Dad.
You're doing great.

Burt obediently pulls into the driveway. Sammy slowly raises his hand, ready to halt the car.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Aaaaaaaaaannnnnd...

When the lens of Sammy's camera completely fills the frame:

TIME CUT TO:

CU of SAMMY, NOW 14, yelling:

SAMMY (CONT'D)

STOP!! FREEZE!!

36

EXT. THE DESERT OUTSIDE PHOENIX - AFTERNOON

36

Three Boy Scouts freeze amid boulders: DEAN; TURKEY (real name Fred); and HARK, (real name Harold). All hold fine-mesh kitchen sieves, and Hark has a lunch box.

Sammy, also in uniform, reaches behind a rock to find an angry scorpion that's backing up, its tail coiled. Sammy expertly lifts the scorpion by its tail.

SAMMY

Where's the lunchbox? Where's the lunchbox?! Hurry!

DEAN

(calling to the others:)
WOW! GUYS, LOOK AT THE MONSTER
SAMMY CAUGHT!

SAL (O.S.)

I got some babies!!

ROGER (O.S.)

Sal found babies!! Sammy,
Dean, c'mon!

Sammy and Dean race around some boulders to join their fellow Scouts. SAL (short for Salvador), shifts a massive rock as they arrive:

SAL (CONT'D)

There's a huge nest right there!
That's a big one, Sammy!

They join Sal on his knees. Everyone scoops up tiny scorpions in their sieves.

Hark runs over so the scorpions can be dropped in the lunchbox, which Hark shakes to prevent them crawling up the sides.

ROGER

SCORPIONS COME IN NESTS!

SAMMY

ACTUALLY IT'S A *BED* OF SCORPIONS -

ROGER, a bespectacled Scout, pontificates from atop a nearby boulder.

ROGER

The baby scorpions are called scorpplings. They're twice as venomous. That's - that's why the lab pays more.

SAMMY
(shaking the box:)
There's got to be like fifty of
'em!

HARK
Well how much is the laboratory
gonna pay?

SAMMY
Fifty cents per baby!

HARK
That's twenty-five bucks!

DEAN
For real?

ROGER
Well, what're we gonna buy?

37 INT. CAMERA STORE, PHOENIX - AFTERNOON

37

CU on three boxes of Kodachrome II 8MM film being plunked
down on the glass countertop.

CLERK (O.C.)
Twelve dollars even.

Sammy counts out the money and puts it on the counter.

38 EXT. A STREET IN ORANGE GROVE ESTATES - AFTERNOON

38

Sammy and his gang are on their bikes, riding down tree-lined
streets and green lawns. Sammy has the bag with the film.

HARK
Well it's the Merit Badge for
photography, not movies. Manual
says you gotta tell a story with
still pictures!

SAMMY
Yeah, but all a movie is is still
pictures. You just put a bunch of
them together and they move.

ROGER
Yeah, but what kind of a movie are
we making?

They see a group of GIRLS their age coming down the street.

SAL

Ooooh, Sammy, look, it's Janet
Benedict!

Sammy stares at one of the girls, very pretty.

TURKEY

Hey, go on and talk to her, I dare
you!

HARK

He already talked to her.

TURKEY

No way!

DEAN

Like hell.

Sammy pedals harder, head down, passing by the girls.

39

INT./EXT. A MOVIE THEATER IN PHOENIX - LATE AFTERNOON

39

The boys jog up to the box office. In display cases on either side of the box office, the marquee one-sheets read: ***Together for the first time James Stewart John Wayne in the masterpiece of four time Academy Award winner John Ford: The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance***

HARK

He did! He did! He walked right up
to her and -

SAL

(to Sammy:)
You went up to *Janet Benedict*?!

TURKEY

What'd you say to her?

SAMMY

Nothing!

HARK

Oh come on, tell 'em what happened,
Sammy!

SAMMY

Nothing happened.

Sammy heads into the theater. Hark turns to the others.

HARK
Something happened.

They follow Sammy inside.

40

CUT TO: 40

They boys are taking their seats in the already-darkened, semi-full theater of OLD PEOPLE watching the afternoon showing, already in progress.

ON SCREEN

STODDARD (Jimmy Stewart) dusts off an old stagecoach while a REPORTER observes.

STODDARD (ON SCREEN)
- the same one.
(reading the coach sign)
"Overland" - Hey, I think it is the same one.

IN THE THEATER

The boys quickly find some seats. Hark plops down next to Sammy, still holding court.

HARK
So Sammy kinda side-winds his way
in her direction -

Frustrated, Sammy huffs and climbs over the seats to the row in front of Hark to escape the story.

HARK (CONT'D)
And he's trying, um - he's trying
to work up the nerve to say
something slick and smooth like
"Hey Jan baby" but -

SAMMY
No I wasn't! You're making this up!

HARK
- but, but he sees that Janet's
got something on her nose, so now
he's thinking "Cool! Here's my
excuse to go up and talk to her!"
so he goes and he says "Hey,
uhhhhhh, sorry, Janet? It looks
like you have a little smudge on
your nose?"

SAMMY
Shut up, Hark!

HARK
But it wasn't a smudge!

SAMMY
It *looked* like a smudge!

HARK
And it wasn't little!

SAMMY
SHUT UP!

HARK
It was a *BOOGER!!* A ***BIG FAT JANET***
BENEDICT BOOGER!

The boys crack up, except for Sammy, mortified. An OLD LADY hisses at them to be quiet. Sammy climbs over another seat to distance himself from the others, putting all his attention on the screen.

ON SCREEN

LIBERTY VALANCE'S (Lee Marvin) masked gang is holding up the stagecoach. Liberty fires his pistol to stop the horses.

IN THE THEATER

The other boys are still giggling about the booger; but Sammy is immediately riveted, swept up and away. Roger leans over the chair, whispers to Sammy.

ROGER
Hey, Sammy?

ON SCREEN

A huge close-up of Liberty Valance, in his black cowboy hat and mask.

LIBERTY (ON SCREEN)
Stand and deliver!

IN THE THEATER

ROGER
What kind of movie are we gonna make?

MATCH CUT TO...

41

INT. A STAGECOACH - NOON

41

... Hark, black-hatted and masked like Liberty Valance, leaning in through the window of a stagecoach that shakes violently as if jouncing at high speed over a rutted road.

HARK
Stand and deliver!

Wisps of dust drifts in. REGGIE, now 13, in a homemade 19th century dress and bonnet, clutching a metal strongbox, and NATALIE, now 11, similarly attired, lean in from opposite sides of the frame facing camera; both girls scream! Suddenly another masked bandit (Turkey) thrusts his head into the window nearest the girls. The girls scream again! The bandits laugh maniacally.

SAMMY (O.S.)
No, keep screaming, keep screaming!

Natalie screams again, but Reggie starts coughing as another wisp of dust floats in.

SAMMY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I NEED MORE DUST!! DAD, CAN YOU
GRAB A SANDWICH BOARD?

42

EXT. PINNACLE PEAK PATIO RESTAURANT, OUTSIDE SCOTTSDALE -
NOON

42

Sammy sits on the hood of Burt's car, filming through the coach's window. Sal, dressed as a bandit, and Dean, in a white sheriff's costume, are on either side of the coach, shaking it violently.

REGGIE
NO!! NO, NO, NO MORE DUST!!

SAMMY
REGGIE STOP COUGHING!!

Burt drops the tray he was using and grabs a tall **PARKING FOR CUSTOMERS ONLY** sandwich board. He begins to wave it as best he can to blow the dust into the coach's window.

REGGIE
I'M COUGHING BECAUSE THERE'S DUST!

BURT
More dust, fellas!

SAMMY
 NATALIE, SAY "PLEASE DON'T KILL
 ME!" REGGIE, STOP COUGHING, YOU'RE
 BEING DRAMATIC. IT'S BAD.

The boys are scooping up dust from a trashcan and flinging as much as they can at the coach.

The RESTAURANT OWNER, a heavysset Greek-American, walks up to Burt:

REGGIE
 DON'T YOU WANT ME TO BE
 DRAMATIC?

THE OWNER
 Mr. Fabelman! You're getting
 dirt inside my stagecoach!!

SAMMY
 DON'T LOOK INTO THE CAMERA!
 GUYS, STOP LOOKING INTO THE
 CAMERA. I CAN'T USE ANY OF
 THIS.

BURT
 Well, we'll clean it out.

REGGIE
 DAD!

INT. FABELMAN HOUSE - EVENING

CU on the bare bulb of an unshaded lamp. Sammy slowly spools film from an 8mm reel, using the back light and a magnifying glass to examine the frames.

He goes through the process of editing, cutting the film in a block, abrading the edge, applying cement and pressing the shots together in the block. The finished element is taped to a table alongside several other labeled cuts.

OVER THIS: Mitzi's playing Friedrich Kuhlau's Piano Sonatina in A Minor, Op 88, No. 3: "Allegro burlesco," which syncs with the movie. Her piano playing continues through this.

INT. BEDROOM CLOSET, FABELMAN HOUSE - EVENING

In the darkened closet, Sammy projects the film against the wall.

8MM FOOTAGE:

The sheriff (Dean) and the bandits (Hark, Sal, and Turkey), shoot at each other from behind rocks, making "pow" sounds when they fire.

Sammy stops the projector, then runs the film in reverse. Back and forth, over and over, fixating on the action of the gun barrels as they "fire".

He pauses the projector and stares at the freeze frame of Dean, disgruntled, disgusted.

SAMMY

Fake. Totally fake.

45

INT. THE LIVING ROOM, THE FABELMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

45

The whole family and Bennie sit in an arc of chairs, listening to Mitzi, in a beautiful flowing dress, make-up and high heels, playing expertly through the first movement, the Allegro of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No.1 in F Minor, Op. 2. Burt is rapt, deep inside the music, enormously proud of Mitzi's artistry. Bennie looks disgruntled. He whispers to Burt:

BENNIE

You hear it?

Burt, not wanting to be distracted, makes a discrete gesture: "Be quiet, I want to listen!" Bennie settles down then, after a few seconds, he whispers again:

BENNIE (CONT'D)

(whispering:)

She has gotta cut those goddamn fingernails before she goes on live television.

Mitzi stops playing and turns to them, annoyed.

MITZI

I have to perform this tomorrow. It's a difficult piece. It's a very big deal for me. All I asked is for you to keep your big traps shut and listen to my dress rehearsal.

BURT

Sorry Mitts! It's wonderful!

(to the kids:)

You hear how the rising arpeggios lift up the sad notes? It's in F Minor but your mom makes it sound so alive.

BENNIE

She makes it sound like she's playing a typewriter.

Everyone laughs, even Mitzi.

MITZI
Oh not this again!

BENNIE
(imitating a combo
piano/typewriter:)
Bah-dah-dee-dah-dee-dah-clickety-
clack clickety clack!

The kids laugh. Burt smiles despite himself.

MITZI
(to Burt:)
Do you hear it? Am I clicking?

BURT
I concentrate on your playing, but -

MITZI
Oh great. *But what?*

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| BURT | | BURT |
| But people can hear it in | * | (to Mitzi:) |
| <i>Tucson!</i> | | Maybe I've gotten used to it? |

REGGIE
Maybe GE should make rubber tips
for fingernails.

Bennie pulls a pair of nail clippers from his pocket!

BENNIE
Alright, Mitzi Fabelman. Time to
face the music.

BURT
Oh boy...

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| MITZI | BENNIE |
| You stay away from me with | (advancing towards her:) |
| those things! No, no, no! | It's Beethoven, dammit, it is |
| Stop, stop, stop it! | not Morse Code! Come on! |

MITZI (CONT'D)
(standing up, to Burt:)
Stop him!

BURT
He has a point, though, especially
with the polydirectional ribbon
microphones they have at television
stations -

Mitzi springs up, sweeping the sheet music to the floor as she makes a break for it. Bennie lunges and wraps his arms around her waist. She screams, laughing but also annoyed. The more she struggles, the tighter he holds her. Reggie's appalled, Natalie's delighted, Lisa is fascinated and a little scared. Sammy's thrilled and appalled in equal measure.

Bennie, holding on to Mitzi, tosses the clippers at Burt. They land on the floor near him.

BENNIE

C'mon! You married her!

REGGIE

Daddy, don't!

MITZI

I will scratch you! Don't think I won't!

NATALIE

Do it! Do it! Do it! DO IT!

Burt grabs Mitzi's ankles and together Burt and Bennie carry her, kicking, laughing, yelling to the sofa.

BENNIE

You think Arthur Rubinstein had fingernails? Horowitz? Schnabel? Kempff?

NATALIE

Do it!

MITZI

No! No no no no!

BENNIE AND BURT

Liberace????!

Burt picks up the clippers and tries them out on his thumbnail.

BENNIE

C'mon, Fabelman, show her who's General Electric's product design manager!

MITZI

NOT MY NAILS MY BEAUTIFUL -

With Bennie holding Mitzi, Burt takes her thumb and moves in with the clippers.

MITZI (CONT'D)

I PAID A BUCK FIFTY AT THE BEAUTY PARLOR FOR THEM NO NO NO NO!

BURT AND BENNIE
 One. Two. THREE!

MITZI (CONT'D)
 (imitating Lucy
 Ricardo:)
 WAAAAAAAAHHHHH!

Mitzi stops struggling and, leaning in very closely, Burt clips one nail. After a quiet beat.

MITZI (CONT'D)
 Get offa me, Delilah.

Bennie releases her. All three are breathing hard, laughing.

BURT
 Delilah?

Mitzi swipes the clippers and stands.

MITZI
 Okay, the fun's over. I'll do the
 rest myself.

Natalie claps enthusiastically and Mitzi answers with a deep curtsey. She notices her sheet music speared on her heel.

MITZI (CONT'D)
 Oh! Oh great, just great.
 (she pulls the page off
 her heel and tosses it:)
 Well that decides it: I'm gonna
 play the program from memory
 tomorrow, no sheet music. Short
 nails. Like a real performing
 artist.

Sammy looks down at the perforated sheet music. The carpet shows through the hole. He picks up the paper and holds the hole up to the chandelier's light. He smiles; an idea is forming.

PRE-LAP: the percussion of Bernstein's score for *The Magnificent Seven*.

49

CUT TO: 49

50

INT. THE LOCAL ARIZONA JAYCEE MEETING HALL - EVENING

50

Pulling back from a running projector to reveal Sammy's Boy Scout Troop 275 is having its bi-monthly Friday evening assembly. There are about 120 SCOUTS watching the movie, mostly white, a few Black, Latinx and Native American Scouts; behind the Scouts, the SCOUTMASTER and a number of DADS, Burt among them. A record player plays the *Magnificent Seven*

soundtrack. While the rest of the audience chuckles along with the movie, Burt sits rapt.

ON THE SCREEN

The 8mm footage of Reggie and Natalie having their stagecoach robbed.

The bandits grab a strongbox from the coach and race off. Turkey fumbles his pistol in the dirt.

IN THE MEETING HALL

Hark mocks Turkey.

HARK

You dropped your gun?!

ON THE SCREEN

Reggie and Natalie in the sheriff's office, gesticulate wildly, pointing, tearing their hair, showing empty purses, describing the robbery to the sheriff (Dean). Looking heroic.

IN THE MEETING HALL

Dean smiles proudly.

DEAN

That's me.

ON THE SCREEN

Dean takes his gunbelt from a coatrack, fastens it and puts on his 10-gallon white hat. Someone calls out from the crowd.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (O.S.)

Scary sheriff!

IN THE MEETING HALL

People chuckle as Dean covers his face, embarrassed. His friends clap him on the shoulder, a silent "attaboy".

ON THE SCREEN

the three bandits (Hark, Sal and Turkey) sit behind a rock, the strong box open, costume jewelry spread out on the rock. The bandits exult over their stolen booty! The sheriff appears, on a boulder above them.

IN THE MEETING HALL

The crowd spontaneously applauds their hero.

ON THE SCREEN

The bad guys draw their guns and break for cover! The sheriff opens fire! It's the scene Sammy had found unsatisfying and fake - but now when the actors fire, SHARP BRIGHT LIGHTS flash from the barrels of their toy cap guns!

Intercut: The audience GASPS in awe! Burt is openly impressed. Roger stares at Sammy like he's a sorcerer.

ROGER

How - How'd you do that?

Two of the bandits are shot. The lead bandit (Hark) realizes his guns are empty and flees up the rocks. The sheriff in close-up points his gun at the camera; he fires. There's a blinding white flash from the end of the gun's barrel!

A makeshift dummy bandit topples floppily over a cliff and falls many feet to his death on the desert rocks!

AUDIENCE

WHOA!

52 A close up of Hark's bandit, dead on the rocks. Above him, 52
Dean holsters his pistol, collects the loot, and walks off.
Then, over black, a title in white: **GUNSMOG.**

The Scouts erupt in cheers and applause!

53 INT/EXT. INSIDE THE FABELMAN'S STATION WAGON/A ROAD IN 53
PHOENIX - EVENING

CU of Sammy's new Merit badge in Photography. Sammy is looking at it, aglow from his triumph. Burt's driving.

BURT

It's kind of like what I do, isn't it? What a movie director does?

SAMMY

It is?

BURT

I figure out what my division needs to accomplish, then I work out how my guys are gonna get it done.

SAMMY

(smiling, pleased:)

Yeah, it is! Yeah! Sorta.

BURT

How'd you make it look like the guns were really firing?

SAMMY

I did it with pins.

BURT

(appreciative)

Pins...

SAMMY

Yeah! I poke holes in the film with pins.

Burt laughs, looking at his son with surprise and delight.

He reaches over and tousles Sammy's hair.

BURT

Sammy! Thinking like an engineer!

SAMMY

(laughing)

Watch the road, Dad.

53A

CUT TO: 53A

A54

EXT./INT. ANOTHER STREET IN PHOENIX/THE FABELMANS' NEW CAR A54
LATE AFTERNOON

The Fabelmans' shiny new station wagon drives along a street from right to left.

54

CUT TO: 54

Inside the car, Sammy, 16, is at the wheel, driving his dad. Burt watches the road like a hawk, nervous.

BURT

Sammy. Watch the road.

SAMMY

I can't edit without an editing machine, I have to be able to cut and splice, and I -

BURT

Let's revisit it after the camping trip.

Sammy sulks.

BURT (CONT'D)

It's three hours to the National Forest. If you get your license you could help with the driving.

SAMMY

(distractedly:)

Okay.

Burt turns back to a driver's ed manual to quiz Sammy.

BURT

You are approaching a railroad crossing with no warning devices and limited visibility the speed limit is -

SAMMY

(then with excitement:)

See the thing is though, about my new movie, is that it's just... It's about World War II, *your war*, it's gonna be like outa this world. I'm shooting on a Bolex H-8!! *Finally* I can use double-run film. You know that's six minutes without having to change the reel?

BURT

How much did you spend to rent this camera?

Sammy hesitates, smelling a trap; then:

SAMMY

Twenty bucks.

Burt whistles at the price.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

But I used my own money, you don't have to -

BURT

And this movie editor gizmo costs -

SAMMY

It's a Mansfield Eight Millimeter Movie Editor.

BURT

How much?

SAMMY

Eighty bucks.

BURT

Doggone it, Sammy! A hundred dollars! For a hobby?

SAMMY

(offended, mad:)

It's not a hobby, dad.

Sammy comes to a stop at an intersection.

BURT

If you spent half the time on algebra that you spend on these -

SAMMY

Algebra? I hate algebra. Why are you...? It's completely pointless.

BURT

Not if you want to make something, it's not pointless. Geez, Sammy, when I was a boy, I always used to think "somebody figured out how to make this, this car, that rearview mirror, that directional signal -"

SAMMY

I want to make movies, though!

BURT

I mean something *real*. Not imaginary. Something someone can actually *use*. Like a driver's license.

55 EXT. THE FABELMANS' CAR, A HIGHWAY TO THE COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST - DAY 55

Pulling a rented luggage trailer packed with camping equipment, the car heads into the mountains.

LISA (O.S.)
I'M GONNA VOMIT, SAMMY!! I'M GONNA VOMIT!!

REGGIE (O.S.)
SAMMY, PLEASE PULL OVER! SHE'S GONNA PUKE ALL OVER ME!!

A56 INT. THE FABELMANS' CAR ON A ROAD IN THE COCONINO NATIONAL FOREST - DAY A56

Natalie, Reggie and Lisa are in the backseat, next to Bennie, bouncing violently over huge ruts in the road.

NATALIE
GO SLOWER! You are the WORST driver. You're gonna break the car.

SAMMY
We're on a back road going three miles per hour. Calm down.

Mitzi, seated between Burt and Sammy, pats his arm.

MITZI
You're doing great, dolly, you're doing great.

Bennie pats Sammy on the shoulder from the back seat.

BURT
Watch out, puddle up ahead.

The car plunges into a deep puddle in the road, plowing through to dry land, but a big bump jars the back of the trailer loose and some of the camping equipment falls out of the trailer and into the muddy water.

57 EXT. A CAMPGROUND IN THE RED ROCK-SECRET MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS DAY 57

Burt demonstrates how to make a branch-and-bark tripod over the fire for cooking, explaining his process to Reggie, 14, Natalie, 13, and Lisa, 8. Sammy films this with his Bolex P1 camera with a zoom lens attached.

BURT

So we've got three that are strong and still green inside so they don't burn. Right? Green means that they're still alive and that they carry moisture. And the reason that we use the shape of the triangle is that when these three points connect, if we find the center of gravitational force it creates almost perfect balance.

Behind them, Mitzi and Bennie laugh as they gather wood. Bennie grabs the top of a small sapling to bend it, inviting Mitzi to climb onto the springy trunk.

BENNIE

- because, I'm Tutti and you're Frutti. So who else are you gonna listen to? A wop bop a lula -

Mitzi struggles to haul herself onto the narrow trunk.

BENNIE AND MITZIE

- a wop bam boom!

She's finally on and -

BENNIE

Okay!

Bennie releases the tree and it spring back upright, carrying a whooping Mitzi with it. Burt drones on obliviously...

BURT

- the pyramids, right? I mean the history behind this shape.

But Reggie has already sprung up to run over to where the fun is happening.

BURT (CONT'D)

It's pretty... It's pretty incredible.

And Natalie takes Lisa by the hand to race after Reggie. Sammy jogs over to film them as Mitzi reverses her position on the trunk to go for another ride.

BURT (CONT'D)

Girls? I'm gonna start the fire!

BENNIE

Three, two, one!

He releases the trunk and Mitzi shouts with joy as she's launched again. Burt diligently strikes flint at the kindling until -

BURT

Oh! It's - it's happening! Wooo!

But everyone else is too busy laughing with Mitzi.

61

CUT TO: 61

It's the last night. Sammy isn't filming. Everyone's around the campfire. Burt and Mitzi sing the verse of the Russian folk song, "Kalinka."

MITZI AND BURT

Kra-ah-sa-vava-vitsa, doo-oo-shah-
vava-d'yeh-vitsa,
Pah-loo-oo-bee-ee zheh-eh tee meh-
eh-enya.

Sammy, Reggie, Natalie and Lisa join in with the chorus:

THE FABELMANS

(a moderate lively tempo:)

Kaleenika, kaleenika, kaleenika
moya!

Zhadoo YAH-goda maleenika,
maleenika moya!

(FASTER!)

Kaleenika, kaleenika, kaleenika
moya!

Zhadoo YAH-goda maleenika,
maleenika moya!

The Fabelmans launch into another chorus. Bennie joins in, making up words.

THE FABELMANS (CONT'D)

(EVEN FASTER!)

Kaleenika, kaleenika,
kaleenika moya!
Zhadoo YAH-goda maleenika,
maleenika moya!

BENNIE

Kleenex-ica, Windex-ica,
She's sexy-ca oh boy!
Pneumonia, dyspepsia,
leukemi-oy-yoy-yoy!

The Fabelmans begin the fourth, super-fast chorus, but Mitzi and the kids start to drop out (NOT ALL AT ONCE) as they listen to Bennie's improvising. Burt continues singing alone, then gives up.

THE FABLEMANS
 Kaleenika, kaleenika,
 kaleenika moya!
 Zhadoo YAH-goda maleenika,
 maleenika moya...

BENNIE (CONT'D)
 Oh Leningrad and Petrograd
 I'm sorry Dad, I lied!
 I snatched the keys and stole
 the car
 And took it for a ride!

Bennie heads immediately into the next verse. Mitzi claps in time: The kids join her. Burt sits it out. Bennie sings:

BENNIE (CONT'D)
 You take it back, paskudniak!
 You're giving me a -

He gestures to Mitzi: "Take it!" She sings:

MITZI
 - heart attack!

BENNIE
 I'll take a zitz and have a -

MITZI
 Schvitz!

BENNIE (CONT'D)
 - schvitz!
 And eat some gribbenitz!

MITZI (CONT'D)
 And schnitzel-bits!

BENNIE (CONT'D)
 Drink slivovitz!
 And we'll get the shits!

REGGIE
 And eat some grits,
 And throw some fits -

NATALIE
 (reacting to "shits":)
 Eeeeewww!

Mitzi falls off her log, laughing. Bennie pulls the camera away from Sammy's eye and pulls him into a dance as the sisters join in. Burt sits quietly.

BENNIE
 We live in Arizonia!
 Where nothing can be grown-ia
 The land is dry and stony-a!

NATALIE
 But we can eat bologni-a!

BENNIE
 EXACTLY!

Everyone cheers. The game deteriorates into a cacophony of "ah" rhymes shouted out by Bennie, Mitzi and the kids: Etcetera, blah blah blah, lah-dee-dah, umbrell-ah, Hanukkah,

oom-pah-pah, grampapa, grandmama, cha-cha-cha, hip-hip-hoorah, Canada, America.

62

CUT TO: 62

Sammy and Reggie listen and watch as Burt pours Bennie a stiff tin cup of Jim Beam; Burt's relaxed, Bennie's arguing passionately, worried.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

They're gonna know that kind of FPU is not for industrial process control and it will raise every red flag there is. How many bits?

BURT

Float 64!

BENNIE

64 bits?! 64 - ?! You are nuts! And time-sharing for eleven operators! They're gonna know this is a business machine we're building, and we're all gonna get fired.

BURT

Naw.

BENNIE

YES!! GE doesn't build business computers, we do heavy industry processing - you got that straight from the CEO. Ralph Cordiner's gonna skin you alive.

BURT

Once Bank of America buys in, this'll be profitable, and that's Mr. Cordiner's job - making money. My job's getting Raytheon to deliver 10,000 germanium transistors that meet our tolerance standards. And your job is to get the cabling diagrams to Pitney-Bowes so when the time comes we have a sorter to hook up to the mainframe.

BENNIE

Well maybe Pitney-Bowes'll hire me after you get us both canned from GE.

BURT

Isn't it worth getting canned for
the chance to build a machine that
can do all that?!

BENNIE

It's worth it to *you*, maybe: Sure
as the Lord made little green
apples, California here *you* come!
IBM is waiting!

Mitzi lies in her tent listening. The kids chime in from the
picnic table.

REGGIE

Are we moving to California?!

BURT

Naw.

BENNIE

Any day now!

SAMMY

What?

BURT

IBM's asking, and that's...
flattering, but -

BENNIE

*Flattering?! Flattering?! Every guy
in computer would give his matzoh
balls to get an offer - You'll be
in California building double-
precision auxiliary units with an
FP 64, and I'm gonna be left
schvitzing in Arizona, making,
making forty-watt lightbulbs.*

Mitzi drains a cup of Jim Beam beside her cot

BURT

(to Sammy and Reggie:)
Hold your horses!

BENNIE

(awestruck:)
Congruence modulo -? Oh my God-

BURT

I told your mom it'll be up to her.
I'm not uprooting us again unless
she says yes.

Mitzi emerges from her tent in a thin nightgown, a bit tipsy.
Reggie and Sammy look at Mitzi. Bennie looks down.

MITZI

Why would momma ever leave all of
this:

(the campsite, the
mountains, the stars)
- for *California*?! We have the
Grand Canyon!! They have the San
Andreas Fault!!

(to Burt:)

Mammalah says: I will never leave
Arizona! And Arizona will never
leave me!!

Mitzi embraces Burt and, to his surprise and even to hers,
gives him a big passionate smooch! Bennie says, with forced
amusement:

BENNIE

Kids! Avert your eyes!

Mitzi pulls away from Burt and begins to dance: She's good, a
natural performer and she's a little drunk.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

(to Sammy:)

Hey, man?

SAMMY

Hmm?

BENNIE

Shouldn't you be filming this?

SAMMY

Not enough light.

Bennie snorts, then jumps up and runs to the car.

BENNIE

GE!! LIVING BETTER ELECTRICALLY!!

He turns on the headlights. Mitzi dances around the bonfire,
spinning in and out of the headlights. Sammy starts to film.
In the headlights, Mitzi's nightgown becomes transparent.

Reggie, embarrassed, rushes over from the picnic table.

REGGIE

Mom. Mom, everyone can see through
your dress. Um - ?

Mitzi ignores her. Reggie half-heartedly dances in front of
Mitzi to block the view.

SAMMY
 (still filming)
 Reggie, get out of the way.

Reggie rushes to her father sitting placidly.

REGGIE
 Dad, can you please stop this?!

He just pats the log next to him.

BURT
 Come sit.

REGGIE
 No.

Frustrated, she rushes over to cover Bennie's face.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
 Bennie, don't look!

He deftly removes her hand and kisses it. Reggie flings him off and storms away.

REGGIE (CONT'D)
 Oh! You're all nuts!

Mitzi swoops, pirouettes, leaps. Burt watches her with love and hunger, overcast with sorrow. Bennie with longing. Reggie watches from her tent, feeling sadness and empathy for her mother.

Mitzi gracefully lowers herself to the ground, ending the performance with a soft smile.

63

INT. - A ROOM IN A NURSING HOME IN CINCINNATI - DAY

63

A few weeks later. Burt sits quietly, focused on a beeping scope. Not an oscilloscope this time, but a heart monitor. He looks scared.

In a nearby hospital bed, Sammy's maternal grandmother Tina, skeleton-thin, her hair transparent, is dying.

Mitzi lies on the bed next to her mother, holding Tina's hand, stroking her hair, whispering to her. Mitzi's eyes are red and scrappy. Sammy sits in a corner. His sisters sit opposite him.

MITZI
 I'm right here. I'm right here with you. I'm holding your hand. Can you

feel that, Mama? Just give me a squeeze.

Sammy focuses on an artery in Tina's thin neck, weakly pulsing. Then... It stops. Sammy blinks, expecting it to start again. But it doesn't. Tina's eyes blink open.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Mom... Mommy?

She turns to the NURSE at the back of the room, excited.

MITZI (CONT'D)

She opened her eyes. Nurse. Mommy, I'm here. I'm right here, Mama. Mommy, look at me. Mommy, please.

The nurse moves to the bed, passing the girls, all on the brink of tears. She quietly takes Tina's pulse, then turns to Burt. But he already knows. The monitor has flatlined.

Frightened, Sammy looks at his father. Burt is still staring at the heart monitor. He seems helpless and afraid.

Mitzi realizes Tina is gone. She starts sobbing. Burt goes to her. He puts his hands on her shoulders but she reaches back to brush him off.

Over this: Satie's "3 Gymnopediés: No. 2" begins to play. With great gentleness, Burt closes Tina's eyes.

64 INT. THE FABELMAN HOUSE, PHOENIX - NIGHT 64

CU on Mitzi playing Satie's "3 Gymnopediés: No. 2". Her eyes are closed; she's somewhere else.

65 CUT TO: 65

CU on Burt's hands opening a cardboard box. Inside, a new Mansfield Eight Millimeter Movie Editor.

BURT

It's a Mansfield Eight Millimeter Movie Editor. That's what you wanted, right?

Sammy and Burt are in Sammy's bedroom. Mitzi's practicing drifts in from the living room.

Sammy stares dumbfounded at the machine. All around him, on the bed, the floor, the walls, his storyboards, gadgetry, model tanks and planes - preparations for *Escape To Nowhere*. Sammy sits down at his new gear in awe.

SAMMY

Oh my god.

BURT

Now I need a favor in return -

Sammy lunges across the box and hugs his dad tight. Burt is very pleased, though a little awkward. He pats Sammy's back.

BURT (CONT'D)

OK, OK. Here's the favor.

SAMMY

Wow, yeah...

Sammy lets go, sits back and waits. Burt listens to Mitzi's playing for a moment, then:

BURT

I want you to make a camping trip movie. You can learn how the editing machine works while you do this. It'll make your mom feel better.

Sammy nods.

SAMMY

Yeah.

BURT

That last night, when she danced in the headlights. That'd be great.
(he stops, listening to Mitzi's music; then:)
Get to it tomorrow, okay?

SAMMY

Um - Tomorrow's when we start shooting.

Burt looks confused. Sammy laughs nervously.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Escape to Nowhere! We're shooting all weekend, I can't -

BURT

Shoot it next weekend.

SAMMY

We've got like forty guys coming to be in the movie! I'll work on all the camping trip stuff on Monday.

BURT

I'm asking you to do this now, for your mom, she's -

SAMMY

Yeah, and I said that I will, just not tomorrow!!

BURT

Don't be selfish. She just lost her mother. That's more important than your hobby.

SAMMY

Dad, can you stop calling it a hobby?

BURT

It'll cheer her up, watching this, it's something we can do to-

SAMMY

Her mom just died! How is that gonna cheer her up?!

BURT

Because you made it for her.

Burt looks down. Mitzi's playing fills the silence. Burt says, almost to himself:

BURT (CONT'D)

Something's... not right. I don't know what else to do.

(a beat:)

Can you help me?

Bewildered, Sammy looks at the editing machine.

66

INT. BURT AND MITZI'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

66

It's dark. The telephone rings, waking Mitzi from a deep sleep. She fumbles, picks up the receiver.

MITZI

Hello?

There's buzzing and crackling, then a voice, sounding like it's coming from far away:

TINA (ON THE PHONE:)

Mitzi? Mitzi!!

MITZI

Mama...?

TINA (ON THE PHONE:)

Somebody's coming!

MITZI

Mama? Mama, what...?

TINA (ON THE PHONE:)

You mustn't let him in.

MITZI

Mama? I can't hear you!

On the other side of the bed, Burt is awake.

TINA (ON THE PHONE:)

Dolly I'm scared, you mustn't let him in the house!

MITZI

Mama, Please, I don't - No, I can't. Who - who's coming? Mama!

TINA (CONT'D)

Do not let him in! Do not open the door! Don't open the door.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Mommy, don't go. Don't go yet.

Burt reaches for the receiver and listens. He hears a dial tone. He returns the receiver to the cradle, then he takes Mitzi in his arms.

BURT

You're having a bad dream.

67

INT. THE KITCHEN, FABELMAN HOUSE - EVENING

67

Burt and the kids are at the table, already crowded with a stunning assortment of dishes, and Mitzi is bringing more from the stove. Again, the table is set with paper and plastic. Mitzi hauls a roast chicken from the oven and awkwardly slides it onto a platter.

NATALIE

This is a *lot* of food, mom.

MITZI

Well, I'm upset.

(to Burt:)

That crazy dream. I can't get it out of my head.

(to the kids:)

REGGIE

You were in the circus?!

MITZI

(to Boris:)

Mama said you were the lion tamer.

The kids are goggle-eyed.

BORIS

Nah. Not at first, at first it was
"Podgorny, pound in the tent pegs,
Podgorny muck out the pachyderms!"
And then one night, the big cat
act, he comes down with a flu bug,
so it was "Boris Podgorny! In with
the lions."

NATALIE

(to Burt:)

He's lying, right?!

BURT

No, he's telling you a story.

BORIS

(to Sammy:)

You know what it's like, huh? Pain
in the ass, sisters.

NATALIE

That's rude!!

LISA

(delighted:)

He said ass!!

SAMMY

But... When did you start working
in the movies?

Boris blows his nose loudly, vividly into his napkin.

BORIS

1927.

SAMMY

1927 that was *The Jazz Singer!* That
was the year the talkies started!

Mitzi, Natalie and Reggie remove the food.

BORIS

Yeah sure, talkies, but me, no, I
started with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, not
a talkie, it was Harry Pollard, he
acted for Selig Polyscope, he

married Maggie Whatsername, he directed *Uncle Tom*.

MITZI

(to Boris:)

Lift up your plate.

Boris does as he's told, continuing to talk as Natalie, Reggie, Mitzi and Sammy lift the ends of the tablecloth.

BORIS

So Pollard needed help with the bloodhounds, so my pal Fleischaker who was a big name in dog acts, poodles mainly.

The kids and Mitzi bring the ends of the tablecloth together, Mitzi ties them in a bundle, then carries the bundle to the trashcan.

BORIS (CONT'D)

But "Sure," Fleischaker says to Pollard, "bloodhounds, poodles, what's the difference?" So he went. But by this time, Fleischaker he had it up to here with the Jew-haters - there was a lot of that kind in the circuses, not many Jews, lots of Jew-haters.

SAMMY

Right.

BORIS

But the movies! Oy vaVOY, Fleischaker writes to me, "Boris," he writes. "Boris," he writes, "Hollywood is haymish, imagine I'm in a minyan with Douglas Fairbanks and Ricardo Cortez?! Come to Hollywood!" So! I went.

(to Burt:)

Your wife, she don't like doing the dishes?

BURT

Ah... Piano hands.

BORIS

(tapping the side of his nose:)

Ah, farshtaynen.

(to Sammy:)

So you like the movies, huh, Mr. Pizzelshass?

69

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

69

The room's even more consumed by *Escape To Nowhere* preparations. The editing machine is on Sammy's desk with footage from the camping trip waiting to be edited.

Sammy's in his PJs, sitting on the floor with Boris, who's in an old undershirt and boxers, his little suitcase open nearby. Also close at hand, a bottle of scotch and a glass. Sammy is showing him his storyboard notebook.

SAMMY

Okay, so then the sergeant he comes over the hill, here, and I'm gonna go below him so we see him and the sky, and so we don't see what he sees, but we do see that he's really, um - okay so he's like almost losing his mind, right, cause what he is seeing is totally terrible! And then I'm gonna turn the camera so that we see it.

He jumps up.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

It's just in another notebook, hang on -

BORIS

(indicating the editing machine:)

That's the movie? You could show me instead of describing me to death.

SAMMY

Nah, that's just our stupid camping trip, my dad's...

(beat)

He wants me to put this camping film together so it'll cheer up mom.

BORIS

Because her heart is broken because her mama iz toyt.

Sammy nods, thinking.

BORIS (CONT'D)

But you, Mr. Director, you don't
wanna do this, what your daddy
tells you, because you wanna make
your war picture, ah?

Sammy's embarrassed, startled to be understood so exactly.

BORIS (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah... Believe me, Sammy
Boy, I get it. Family, art:
(he makes a fierce gesture
meaning: "Pulled apart")
It'll tear you in two.

Down the hall, Mitzi softly plays Muzio Clementi's Sonatina
in C Major, Op. 36. No. 3: I. "Spiritoso".

BORIS (CONT'D)

(lifting his head, as if
scenting something:)
You hear that?

SAMMY

Oh yeah, my mom's practicing, she's
always -

BORIS

Shah!!!! You talk too much!!
Listen!!

Boris opens the door to hear better. Mitzi's playing is
tender, soulful, soft.

BORIS (CONT'D)

When she was a kid, already she
played like that, she shoulda been
a concert piano player, a little
Rubenstein she was, she coulda
played... you name it, she coulda
played there, and she, once I
visited her and Teenee and Menashe
in Cincinatti, and she says to me
she wants to be a great piano
artist, but... She didn't do it.

SAMMY

Yeah, she's really good! You know
she played on TV!

BORIS

TV!! Feh!! She coulda played the
Musikverein in Vienna!
(he leans towards Sammy:)

You see what she got in her heart
 is what you got, what I got - *ART*.
 Like me, like you I think, we're
 junkies and art is our drug. Family
 we love, but art, we're meshugah
 for art. You think I wanted to
 leave my sisters, my mama and papa
 and go stick my stupid head in the
 mouth of lions?!?!

SAMMY

Putting your head in a lion's mouth
 is art?

BORIS

(roaring with laughter,
 then with ferocious
 seriousness:)

NO!! Sticking your head in the
 mouth of lions was *balls!!* Making
 sure that lion don't eat my head??
That is art!!

(he takes a drink:)

You see Teenee, she didn't say to
 Mitzi "go do what you gotta!" I
 mean she was a good person, my
 sister, but she was scared. Scared
 for your mother, she should have
 safety and family. So Mitzi, she
 gave it all up.

He gives Sammy's cheek a horrible hard squeeze. Sammy yowls.
 Boris hangs on, examining Sammy's head, one side then the
 other; after one last painful shake, he lets Sammy go.

SAMMY

OW!

Sammy grabs his cheeks, rubbing them, his eyes watering.

BORIS

I want you should remember how that
 hurt. Because when they say all
 this -

(gesturing to the film
 preparations all over)

- when they say what you do, it's
 cute, it's a hobby, it's like
 stamps or butterfly collecting, you
 feel your face how it feels now!

SAMMY

Yeah, you almost pulled it off!

BORIS

So you remember your Onkl Boris and what he's telling you: Because you're gonna join the circus, I can tell. You can't hardly wait, you wanna be in the big top, you'll shovel elephant shit until they say "OK, Sammy, now ride the goddamn elephant!" Oh you love those people, ah?

(gesturing to the rest of the house)

Your sisters, your mama, your papa, except -

(whispering, gesturing to the editing machine:)

- *except this, this I think you love a little more.*

SAMMY

No I don't!

Boris, laughing, reaches for Sammy's cheeks. Sammy jumps up and steps out of reach! Boris howls at him:

BORIS

Run all you want, boychick, but you know I ain't whistlin' Dixie here!! *You will make your movies, and you will do your art, and you remember how it hurt so you know what I'm saying: Art will give you crowns in heaven and laurels on earth. BUT!! It'll tear your heart out and leave you lonely. You'll be a shonde for your loved ones, an exile in the desert, a gypsy. Art is NO GAME!! Art is dangerous as a lion's mouth, it'll bite your head off!! LOOK AT ME!! LOOK AT ME!! IS IT A WONDER THAT TEENEE, SHE WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH ME?! WITH - WITH M-*

(crying brokenheartedly:)

TEENEE!!! OH, TEENEE!!!

He tears his undershirt and pulls at his hair. Sammy's horrified.

SAMMY

Stop! Stop! Stop it!!

Boris stops.

BORIS

What, you never saw nobody grieving before? Pfft!

(lying down on the floor:)

Let's go to sleep, buballah.

SAMMY

Um, you can sleep in the bed. I have my sleeping bag.

BORIS

I'm sitting shiva for my sister. I sleep on the floor. You wanna sleep on the floor too?

(shrugs:)

She was your grandma. Tear your clothes. Sleep on the floor. Goodnight.

Sammy carefully tears a corner of the pocket on his PJ shirt and stands pensively before his editing machine.

70

EXT. OUTSIDE THE FABELMAN HOUSE - MORNING

70

A cab waits as the family gathers to send off Boris.

MITZI

(to Lisa)

Say bye bye.

LISA

Bye bye.

BORIS

Bye bye.

As he heads for the taxi, the CABBIE tries to help with his bag. Boris hangs on until the driver relents. He tosses the suitcase in the cab then turns back, pointing at Sammy, who seems pinned by his intensity. The family all turn to Sammy, puzzled. Boris repeats the torn-in-two gesture. He gets in the cab and it drives away. Burt puts his arm around Mitzi.

MITZI

(wiping her eyes:)

I don't know what momma was so worried about. It was a nice visit.

71

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM/THE LIVING ROOM - 2AM

71

Mitzi in her nightgown in the living room, playing the Adagio from Bach's Concerto in D Minor, BMV 974. Burt is on the

sofa, papers all about him, scribbling work-related notes as he listens to her play.

73

CUT BACK TO: 73

The editing machine's loaded. Sammy turns the handle, feeding footage through the viewer: Mitzi eats some stew from the campfire. She turns to Sammy's camera and opens her mouth wide, exhibiting the masticated contents. Then she feigns theatrically choking and dying. Reggie steps in to haul her to her feet, laughing.

Sammy transfers the film to the editing block and cuts out the shot to add to the series of trims taped to his table.

Everyone walks up a steep path, smiling, waving at the camera. Sammy at the editing machine scowls and cranks faster, racing through till he gets to:

Mitzi rides up and down on the sapling while Burt teaches the girls tripod-building. Sammy at the editor slows down at a possible jump from the tree lifting Mitzi to a close-up of her face, laughing, lit-up, a little scared. He enjoys speeding it up, reversing it.

Sammy searches through a new reel, now enjoying the work. He cranks ahead till he gets to:

Burt gutting a fish, Lisa, Natalie and Reggie looking grossed out. Reggie pretends to eat the fish guts, grossing out Natalie. Sammy chuckles, then he cranks ahead, stops and reverses - his eye's been snagged by something. Cranking the film forward again, slowly, Sammy bends closer to the ground-glass screen. At a distance from Burt and the girls, in the frames' background, Mitzi and Bennie are seated on a log together, deep in conversation. Bennie playfully puts his hat on Mitzi's head.

Sammy stares at this frame, then he slowly turns the crank, wanting to move past this but also reluctant to do so. Deciding to leave it, he zooms through a few more scenes.

Everyone's walking across a stone bridge, pretending to be tightrope walkers, Mitzi and Bennie last in line. Bennie puts both his hands on Mitzi's shoulders and starts to draw her close to him. Sammy slows the film down as Mitzi allows Bennie to hold her before she spins and pulls Bennie's big hat down over his eyes. The reel ends and Sammy, yawning, changes it out.

CUT TO:

In the living room, Mitzi continues with the Bach. Burt listens as he works, making calculations with one hand, conducting with the other.

77

CUT BACK TO: 77

Sammy scrolls rapidly through a new roll, stopping at a sequence of Reggie and Natalie clowning around with some branches. In the background, Bennie and Mitzi walk along a trail into the woods.

Something catches Sammy eye and he reverses the film to play it again slowly, intent on -

Mitzi and Bennie in the woods, partly obscured by tree branches, but what's not hidden is Bennie putting his hand tenderly on the small of Mitzi's back; Mitzi moves his hand away, but as she does she looks back over her shoulder to make sure no one's watching. Then she leans over and kisses Bennie's ear. He playfully flicks at his ear as if brushing off a mosquito. They laugh and walk together into the darkness of the woods, Mitzi leaning her body against Bennie's as they disappear from view.

Sammy throws the reel off the editor and reloads the earlier one of the stone bridge crossing. The intimacy between Mitzi and Bennie is even more clear as she gazes lovingly into his eyes when he steadies her balance.

CUT TO:

In the living room, Burt continues "conducting" with his pencil.

CUT TO:

Sammy has loaded a new reel: Mitzi, Burt and Bennie clowning around at the campsite. Burt and Bennie laugh as Mitzi gesticulates dramatically, doing silent movie Lillian-Gish-type schtick. She puts her hand to her forehead in a 19th Century stage swoon. Both Burt and Bennie move to catch her. Mitzi switches direction mid-swoon to make sure that when she's caught, it's by Bennie, not Burt. Bennie dips her as if about to go in for a passionate kiss. He scrolls slowly ahead to a frame of Bennie's and Mitzi's faces, almost about to kiss. The next frame, an instant so quick it barely registered, but there it is on frame: Mitzi has abandoned her stage-pucker and is looking up into Bennie's eyes meaningfully, sad, serious.

Sammy shoves back from the movie editor and stands, overwhelmed, terrified; he's having a panic attack.

CUT TO:

In the living room, Mitzi is reaching a climax in the piece she's playing. Sammy seems pinned to the wall with the incriminating frame of Mitzi and Bennie frozen on the screen. He slumps to the floor.

78 CUT TO: 78

79 Mitzi finishes gently. Burt, still on the sofa but sitting up, watches her with love. Mitzi returns his gaze, unreadable. 79

CUT TO:

81 INT. THE DINING ROOM - NIGHT 81

Burt, Bennie, Reggie, Natalie and Lisa sit around the table in the dark, watching the camping film. On screen, Mitzi mugs for the camera with her mouth full of food. They all laugh.

LISA

Yuck!

On screen, Mitzi pretends to choke. Then it cuts to her riding the springy sapling.

FAMILY

Whoa!

On screen, Mitzi peeks out at the camera from her sleeping bag.

FAMILY (CONT'D)

Aww...

As the on screen Mitzi sits up and speaks to the camera, real-life Mitzi does her best to dub herself.

MITZI

This. Is. The. Life!

Sammy watches, unsmiling.

On screen, Mitzi's dance, edited by Sammy, dramatic and beautiful. Joy, sorrow, desire move across Mitzi's face as she vanishes into the darkness beyond the headlights, then, with her instinct for drama, Mitzi runs to the campfire, lifts out a flaming smoking branch, and begins to twirl around with it, whirling a trail of smoke and embers, caught in the headlights, until she's cloaked herself in her own nocturnal tornado.

BENNIE

Only you can prevent forest fires.

MITZI

Shhh...

Then everything goes brilliant white as the film spools out. Mitzi gets up and goes to him, enfolding him in her arms.

MITZI (CONT'D)

It's so beautiful, what you made,
Dolly. You really see me.

He allows it for a moment, but then steps aside to busy himself with the projector.

BENNIE (O.S.)

Hey, man, how 'bout that, huh?

BURT (O.S.)

(quietly:)

Hey Sammy. That was real neat.

Sammy can't speak. Mitzi is left with a quizzical look:
"What's wrong."

83

EXT. AN ABANDONED ADOBE PUEBLO, THE DESERT OUTSIDE PHOENIX - 83
DAY

A teen in a t-shirt and a makeshift Nazi helmet stands on a boulder, bringing his assault weapon to bear.

"NAZI" SOLDIER

DIE AMERIKANER!!!

As his comrades charge over the rocks, he jiggles his gun from fake "recoil" and makes machine gun sounds with his mouth.

Other howling BOYS charge at the camera, in uniform: tan chinos, black t-shirts, black infantry caps, each with a cardboard badge of a Swastika-clutching German eagle. The kid playing their commander wears a genuine WWII German helmet. They're armed with toy rifles and BB guns; a few have real lugers which they wave as they hurl themselves forward, laying siege to an American stronghold inside the pueblo.

They sweep past Sammy, who pans with them to catch all of the action on his camera.

Sammy digs two shallow holes in the dirt, then sets a board on a rock as a pivot point to seesaw between the divots. He covers one end with dirt so that when he steps on the other side of the board, it launches a cloud of dirt into the air. Instant "explosion". The costumed actors are thrilled by the effect.

In a series of fast, VIOLENT cuts: Hand-to-hand combat, American soldiers in white t-shirts and green infantry caps bayoneting Germans, Germans shooting Americans. The boys have sponges filled with red tempera paint; when they get shot, they press the sponges and squeeze; the blood oozes out. Sammy, crouching, moves in and around the fighting soldiers, filming. He uses an old baby carriage as a makeshift dolly to sweep across a line of charging soldiers. He comes in close as one soldier, shot in the face, mashes his hands against his eyes and screams as blood gushes between his fingers.

Roger carefully lays a string of firecrackers in a shallow trench, then covers it with dirt. Later, as soldiers race through the area, the firecracker puffs mimic machine gun fire tearing through their ranks. They all fall.

Then ANGELO, a tall, handsome, tough-looking 16 year old playing an American sergeant, enters with a surplus army machine gun. He fires at the Germans. Dozens of firecrackers, concealed in the wall against which the Germans have been forced, detonate! Despite the visible evidence of burning fuses, this sells the impression of bullets destroying the wall and the soldiers! Germans collapse like bloody, dusty rag dolls!

SAMMY

Turn...

Angelo turns so the camera can catch his face, looking heroic.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

CUT! GREAT! Now...

Sammy hands Sal the camera and pulls Angelo aside to issue new directions. Hark, Turkey and Dean hand out Dixie cups of kool-aid to the dead soldiers, while Roger and Sal carefully wipe the dust from the lens.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

You're standing here for a minute,
looking down at what just happened -

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I'll give you a signal when I
want you to start to move,
okay? -
No, don't count to 60, you
just gotta -

ANGELO

A whole minute?

Like, you mean I should count
to 60, like one-Mississippi two-
Mississippi? And then I move?

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(regrouping)

So you're all like, Oh my God, like
ALL my men, they're all, they're
all *dead!* All my men, they're -

ANGELO

So you want me to like act and
stuff.

SAMMY

Yeah! Right, um, that's the -

ANGELO (CONT'D)

Like I'm sorta sad or
something. Cuz my whole
platoon -

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Right right, *your* platoon. *Your*
men. They've been wiped out. These
guys they're your *family*, your
family's being like, like *murdered*,
and it's your fault, you did this
to them, and -

ANGELO

I thought it was the Nazis that -

SAMMY

Okay, yeah but, but it was *you* gave
the order to go down into the
Valley of Death! Okay, *you decided*.
Nobody else. You coulda, you coulda
protected them, okay? 'Cause they
trusted you, and they loved you.
Now you're just looking at this, at
this thing that you've done, and
you can't save them anymore -

ANGELO

Because they're all dead.

Sammy nods, his eyes filled with tears, shaking.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

(seriousness sinking in:)

Wow, that's... real gung-ho. Um,
okay.

(he's got it:)

Okay.

SAMMY

You good?

ANGELO

Lock and load. Yeah, yeah. Lock and load. Alright.

SAMMY

Good.

LATER

Angelo steps from behind a ruined wall, a mass of dead soldiers behind him. He looks down at the valley in front of him.

Angelo has an instinctive understanding of how to do this acting thing. His face is hard, clenched tight, but something powerful is battering away beneath the surface, and as he walks slowly down among the bodies of his men, Sammy creeps along beside him, tracking him with the baby carriage dolly.

As the camera moves with Angelo, the "dead men" behind him scramble to their feet and race around behind the camera to set up again in FRONT of Angelo. They hit the dirt just as Angelo reaches them and Sammy pans to take in the "new" carnage - twenty American soldiers, strewn across the desert in the positions and postures of their final agonies.

Angelo walks through the bodies and out into empty desert. Sammy keeps filming, but Sammy takes his eye off the camera, leaving it running on the tripod. Angelo, overwhelmed, openly weeps with his back to the camera. Sammy stares at Angelo's retreating form, his thoughts elsewhere.

SAL

Uh, Sammy? How far you gonna let him walk?

SAMMY

(snapping out of his reverie:)

CUT!!!

Angelo doesn't hear him; he keeps walking. The dead soldiers start to stand and with Sammy's crew they yell at Angelo:

DEAD SOLDIERS AND CREW

ANGELO!!! HEY THAT'S A CUT,
ANGELO!! STOP!!! CUT!! COME BACK!!!

SAMMY

ANGELO!!!

85

INT. THE JAYCEE HALL, PHOENIX - NIGHT

85

Sammy, in his scout uniform, mans the projector once more. It's being watched by an audience of Boy Scouts and their parents, mostly dads, clearly swept up in the drama onscreen.

In a middle row, Reggie, Natalie, Lisa, Burt, Mitzi and Bennie sit, as enthralled as everyone else. The sound of the projector starts to grow louder and louder.

8MM: The heat of the climactic battle by the adobe pueblo, Americans and Germans killing each other.

Alfred Newman's "Buffalo Stampede" from *How The West Was Won* is playing on a phonograph record; underneath the music, the whirring of the projector.

Behind the projector, Sammy's attention is angrily, exclusively fastened on the backs of the heads of Burt, Mitzi and Bennie.

ON THE SCREEN

The carnage continues. A blast to the chest of one soldier is accented by an exceptionally bloody makeshift squib.

IN THE AUDIENCE

Everyone GASPS and Natalie quickly covers both Lisa's eyes and her own. Lisa pushes her sister's hand aside.

ON THE SCREEN

Angelo mows down the last of the Germans, then steps out of the ruins and begins his solemn walk through the valley of his slain comrades and into the desert.

IN THE AUDIENCE

The projector's whirr is turning into a loud roar in Sammy's ears, beginning to drown out Newman's score.

Mitzi is deeply moved by the moment. Natalie and Reggie are rapt, but Sammy's focus remains on his parents and Bennie.

Over the shot of Angelo walking away, a screen title announces: **"ESCAPE TO NOWHERE"**.

The audience applauds, but Sammy can't take his eyes off the three adults. They're applauding too - Mitzi ecstatically.

Sammy watches Burt turning, smiling and excited, to Mitzi, just at the moment when Mitzi turns to Bennie to mouth silently: "OH MY GOD!"

CU on Sammy, his face fierce, stricken, drawn tight, glaring at the three adults. They turn to face him, directing their applause to him.

BURT

Sammy!

86

EXT. THE JAYCEE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

86

The scouts and their families are leaving. Roger, Turkey, Sal, Dean and Hark help Sammy load equipment into the car. Mitzi, her hands on Sammy's shoulders, whispers:

MITZI

Oh Dolly. You're not a civilian anymore. That movie, my God it was -

Sammy, scowling, steps back, shrugging off her hands. Roger edges by to load some equipment.

ROGER

Hi, Mrs. Fabelman.

Sammy turns to Mitzi, but has nothing to say. He walks off, leaving her puzzled and slightly hurt.

Bennie barrels up to Sammy.

BENNIE

(moving in to hug Sammy:)
Mister DeMille! C'mere!

Sammy silently sidesteps him to join his father, who stands with Angelo, SCOUTMASTER NEWHART, and one of the troop DADS.

BURT

Hey, there he is!

Sammy grins, embarrassed, as the dads slap him on the back and compliment him.

ANGELO

Hey!

TROOP DAD

Congratulations, young man!
Congratulations!

SCOUTMASTER NEWHART

Guess you based it on your father's war stories, huh?

SAMMY

Sort of, you know. He doesn't really like to talk about it, so...

SCOUTMASTER NEWHART

I understand.

The girls walk up.

REGGIE

Dad, Mom's getting a ride with Bennie. She'll see us at home.

Burt and Sammy both look across the parking lot: Mitzi is getting into the passenger seat of Bennie's car; he's holding the door for her.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

(to Sammy)

Hey, why do you like blood so much?

NATALIE

Are you ever gonna make a movie with parts for girls again?

Sammy looks at Burt to gauge his reaction; Burt looks surprised, a little crestfallen. Then, aware that Sammy's scrutinizing him, he gives Sammy a bemused, quizzical look. Sammy immediately looks away, turning to his sisters.

SAMMY

(still distracted)

What?

NATALIE

With GIRLS. You know, like, when all the men stare off into the distance all the time, maybe a girl can save the day.

CU on the BSA pamphlet for Life-Saving, open to a section dealing with saving people who are drowning.

Sammy, shirtless in swimming trunks, Reggie, Natalie and Lisa are at the breakfast table. Mitzi, upset, closed off, is making a huge batch of matzoh brei. Sammy is in his bathing suit. He's not eating. Natalie holds the BSA pamphlet and is quizzing Sammy.

NATALIE

OK what are the five steps to save
a drowning person?

SAMMY

One is you swim behind the person
so they don't grab you. Two you
throw your arm across his chest.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

REGGIE

Three -

Or *her* chest.

THREE you swim on your back,
with the victim on your
chest, using your free arm to
paddle yourself -

NATALIE

Not Sammy, he's too scared of
girls' boobies.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(to Natalie)

And speaking of boobies, if you
ever get any we'll have a party.

REGGIE

And at the party we'll give her the
booby-prize!

NATALIE

Ha-HAH! What's four?

SAMMY

Ummmm... Crap.

NATALIE

Bring the victim to land, dummy!
And then five:

Sammy tries to remember.

MITZI

Call the undertaker.

SAMMY

(to Mitzi, immediately
angry:)

This is serious business! I gotta
know all of this to get the
Lifesaving Merit Badge! More kids
die in swimming accidents than in
any other kind of accident!

MITZI

Sorry, I'm sorry.

SAMMY

Not everything is a big joke.

MITZI

Okay, okay, so what's step number five?

SAMMY

You laugh at *everything*, even when nothing's funny! You always have to be the center of attention!

Mitzi slams a plate of matzoh brei in front of him.

MITZI

Eat! And don't talk with your mouth full!

SAMMY

I'M NOT EATING THIS CRUD BEFORE A SWIMMING TEST!! YOU CAN GET CRAMPS IN THE WATER IF YOU EAT BEFORE AND YOU CAN DROWN FROM GETTING CRAMPS.

Reggie springs from her chair to confront Sammy.

REGGIE

Stop shouting at her!

MITZI

Sammy Fabelman! Goddamn it, for weeks now it has been nothing but disrespect from you!

SAMMY

(attempting a sneering laugh:)
"Disrespect!"

MITZI

Why are you being such a little shit to me? Dammit to hell, I am your mother!!

Sammy jumps up and walks up to Mitzi and snarls:

SAMMY

I WISH YOU WEREN'T!!

He turns and starts to walk away. Mitzi, before she can catch herself, strikes out at him, slapping his bare back with her

open hand so hard that he stumbles forward. The slap sounds like a gunshot. Sammy spins around; they're both shocked. The girls are shocked. Lisa starts crying. Sammy turns and runs to his room. Mitzi stands there, stunned at what she's done.

89

CUT TO: 89

Sammy slams the door of his bedroom, fighting to hold back tears. He throws open the closet door and looks at his back in the mirror. An angry red welt is rising in the exact shape of his mother's open hand.

Mitzi enters the bedroom. Sammy starts to pull on a t-shirt. Mitzi goes to him and stops him, spinning him around. She sees the red hand-print on his back.

MITZI

Let me see... Oh my God, oh what
have I done?

He spins on her. He looks as if he's going to attack her. She takes an involuntary step back. Sammy stands there, shaking, his fury being replaced by a plea for help he's not able to speak. She retreats, shocked, small.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Talk to me.

Sammy turns to the door, but Mitzi grabs his shoulders, pleading.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Sammy, please. Talk to me. Tell me
what's happening. Do you have any
idea how much I love you?

He nods. Then steps away.

MITZI (CONT'D)

(small)
Don't go...

But instead of leaving, he closes the bedroom door. Mitzi watches as he goes to his desk, opens a drawer and takes out a small plastic reel of film.

He looks at his mom for a moment, then decides. He plugs in the projector, goes into the closet, sits on the floor and starts loading the film.

CU on Sammy's nimble fingers expertly threads the film through the sprocket holes, then through the gate, which he closes, then up to the take-up reel.

Sammy opens the closet and extends a hand to Mitzi, who's smiling to cover her confusion. He takes her hand and gently pulls her into the closet.

She sits on the floor of the closet next to the projector. Sammy looks at her. There's another flash of hesitation, then he reaches down and switches on the projector. He steps out of the closet, closing the door behind him.

90

CUT TO: 90

The dark closet lights up as the film starts to play on the opposite wall. Mitzi, her face uplit by the projector's light, watches, baffled, bemused when she recognizes that this is more footage from the camping trip. Then:

8MM: FULL SCREEN: Mitzi sitting by Bennie as he playfully puts his hat on her head.

Mitzi watches, smiling at first. But her smile slowly fades as the clips continue and she realizes what they mean.

IN THE BEDROOM

Sammy sits on his bed, waiting in anxious silence.

IN THE CLOSET

The film runs through the projector and flaps in the take-up reel. Mitzi opens the door and clumsily crawls out of the closet on all fours. Sammy's sitting there, paralyzed. Realizing that the projector is still running, Mitzi yanks its power cord from the wall socket; then she sits on the floor.

She begins to cry, trying to stop herself, but the floodgates burst open: She sobs, loudly, devastated. Sammy doesn't know what to do. He sits down on the floor next to his mom.

SAMMY

Mom... Mom... I won't tell. I won't tell, I won't

She hides her face and can't speak. He leans into her, resting his head on her shoulder. She puts her arm around him. They sit, Mitzi crying, Sammy horrified at what he's done.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I won't tell. I won't.

FADE TO BLACK.

92

INT. A CAMERA STORE, PHOENIX - DAY

92

CU on Sammy's much-used Bolex P1 camera in Sammy's hands, putting it down on the glass counter top.

THE FIRST CLERK (O.S.)
You sure about this?

SAMMY
Uh huh.

A rapping at the other end of the counter makes Sammy look; Bennie's handing a receipt to a SECOND CLERK.

BENNIE
There ya go, bought and paid for.

THE SECOND CLERK
(taking the receipt:)
Oh, just a second, it's in the
back.

Bennie notices Sammy, waves and makes is way down the counter.

BENNIE
Stocking up on Kodak before the big
move?

SAMMY
(confused, suspicious,
hostile:)
No, I'm -

BENNIE
Smart! Film's cheaper here than in
California. I bet everything's more
expensive there.
(to the clerk:)
You're losing your steadiest
customer. Him and his whole family,
they're moving west.

THE FIRST CLERK
(nodding, then:)
He just sold me his camera.

BENNIE
(to Sammy:)
Oh yeah? How come?

THE FIRST CLERK
Says he's finished.

The second clerk returns, placing a large box on the counter.

THE SECOND CLERK

Sorry about the wait, Mr. Loewy, we had to order it special.

SAMMY

You bought a camera?

Making a drumroll, Bennie slides the box across the counter to Sammy. It's a new Bolex H-8 Reflex camera.

BENNIE

It's for you.

Sammy stares at Bennie.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

I know how much you loved using it for your war picture, so I figured you oughta have one of your own. It's, um, a bon-voyage-see-ya-later-alligator-I-believe-in-you present from your uncle Bennie.

93

EXT. THE PARKING LOT OF THE CAMERA STORE - DAY

93

Sammy storms out of the shop and crosses the street. Bennie catches up with him, grabs him by the arm, turns him around and thrusts the camera at him. Sammy won't take it.

BENNIE

Because it's from me?

Sammy looks away. Bennie stares at the box he's holding; then:

BENNIE (CONT'D)

This move, huh? This, this is your dad's Glory Hallelujah moment, and oy vavoy, Sammy, does that guy ever deserve it! All the way back when, back at RCA, he knew what computing was gonna be about, before practically anybody else knew it. And IBM, that's where guys like Burt are figuring out how to use what he's made to - they're gonna change the whole goddamn world. So this was the right decision, for all sortsa reasons.

He waits for Sammy to respond. Sammy just turns to walk the other way.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

Yeah, so, I'm happy for you, you know I am... But I'm gonna miss you. All of you. A lot.

Sammy glares at Bennie, daring him to continue. Bennie nods, then again offers the camera to Sammy, who steps back.

BENNIE (CONT'D)

Think whatever bad things you want about me, kiddo, but you stop making movies, it'll break your mother's heart. You will break her heart, I mean it.

(he tears up:)

And she doesn't deserve that, not from anybody. Least of all from you.

He holds out the box. Sammy goes to walk away, but then pauses and turns back, looks at the cash he's holding.

SAMMY

I'll give you 35 bucks for it.

BENNIE

You drive a hard bargain, kid.

He holds out the box. Sammy holds out the money. Bennie takes it and hands him the box. Suddenly Bennie hugs Sammy, fiercely. As he does, a sob escapes. Bennie lets Sammy go. He turns and walks towards his car.

SAMMY

I'm still done making movies though.

BENNIE

Everybody makes movies in California!

Bennie gets into his car. Sammy looks down: the cash is sticking out of his shirt pocket.

SAMMY

Hey!

BENNIE

(already driving away)
Keep the change.

94 EXT./INT. THE FABELMAN CAR, A HIGHWAY BRIDGE, ARIZONA- CALIFORNIA BORDER - NOON 94

Over this, The Crystals sing "Da Doo Run Run," ushering the Fabelmans out of Arizona. The Fabelman car rounds a curve in the highway with a small sign: **WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA!**

95 CUT TO: 95

Inside the car, The Crystals still singing.

LISA
When will the new house be finished?

BURT
A few months. In the spring.

LISA
Can I have my own room?

BURT
Everybody gets their own room.

LISA
Yay!

In the backseat, Natalie and Reggie smile! Mitzi, withdrawn, sporting a new cowboy hat, stares out the window. Burt laughs. Everyone looks at him.

BURT
I just remembered last night I had a funny dream.

REGGIE
What was it?

BURT
I can't believe I dreamed this. Uh, Bennie and me were having an argument, and I hauled off and socked him right in the nose.

Mitzi stares at Burt, mouth agape.

96 CUT TO: 96

HIGH SHOT, CALIFORNIA VISTA: The car pulls onto the shoulder of the highway. A small figure emerges from the passenger side. Mitzi throws her hat in the dirt and makes her way up a hill covered with ice poppies.

97 CUT TO: 97

Inside the car, the kids watch their mom climb the hill.
Burt, expressionless, turns off the engine.

NATALIE

What's wrong?

LISA

Is mommy carsick?

Everyone sits for a moment.

BURT

Let's just give her a little time.

Sammy shoots an angry look at the back of his father's head, then opens the door. He slams it shut, then climbs the hill.

Mitzi sits against a split rail fence, sunglasses on to hide her tears. Sammy leans against the fence by her. She takes off her glasses to look up at him.

Sammy goes up to her and sits down beside her. She takes his hand and squeezes it.

MITZI

Bennie and me, we never... we never
d - we never let it get as far as I
imagine you think.

SAMMY

Oh I never imagined any of that.

MITZI

Do you think dad knows? I don't
mean did you tell him, I know you
didn't. But - do you think he has
an inkling?

Sammy has no answer.

MITZI (CONT'D)

I've almost told him so many times.
I'll say "Burt, there's something
I've got to tell you," and, and he
looks at me like he can't conceive
that anything could be wrong
between us. So instead I say "Burt,
we got ants," or "Burt, could you
climb on the roof and turn the
antenna so I can watch Channel 5?"
Which, of course, he does.

(heartbreak threatens to
overwhelm, then:)

I can't fight with your father. He

kills with such kindness. I'm mean to him, he buys me a dress. From Saks.

SAMMY

(a beat, then:)

Mom, when I showed you what I filmed, I never meant for any of this to happen.

MITZI

(she nods, considering this, then, firmly:)

Guilt is a wasted emotion.

A little surprised at this, Sammy starts to respond, then doesn't. Then:

SAMMY

What's gonna happen now?

MITZI

(a beat, then:)

I'm gonna be your mom. I'm gonna be the girls' mom. Despite my countless faults, I'm not ruining everything for everyone. I'm gonna not be selfish. Burt Fabelman is the kindest, smartest, wisest, most patient, most decent, most understanding man there is. And I'm gonna stay married to him.

Sammy looks at her, wanting to believe her. Mitzi stands and offers a hand to help Sammy up, resolved, smiling reassuringly.

A98 EXT. THE RENTAL HOUSE, LOS GATOS - SUNSET

A98

The Fabelmans' car is parked outside.

SCREEN TITLE: **NORTHERN CALIFORNIA**

98 INT. THE RENTAL HOUSE, LOS GATOS - SUNSET

98

The interior is gloomy, meager furniture covered in sheets; the piano stands among unopened moving boxes, mummified in moving blankets and tape. Mitzi and the kids, holding the things they've brought with them from the car, look around, appalled. Then:

BURT

It's only a rental. The new house'll be ready faster than you can say Jack Robinson.

REGGIE

Jack Robinson.

MITZI

(despondent:)

And... We're still here.

99

EXT. A SIDEWALK IN SARATOGA, CA - MORNING

99

Sammy, Reggie and Natalie are walking to school, Natalie teasing Sammy, who ignores her.

NATALIE

Just tell me if you're gonna mope for the rest of your life or is this something you plan to outgrow?

SAMMY

Bug off.

NATALIE

You're like going for the Misery Merit Badge. You and mom, with your long faces. She can't even get out of bed to make breakfast, and -

REGGIE

(Turning on them:)

Okay! New rule, guys! When we walk to school in the morning let's just leave all the Fabelman mishegas behind us in the Fabelmans' moldy old rental house! And for eight hours a day let's be normal ordinary kids in an ordinary normal school, okay?

The school is in sight. They watch the other students going in. Sammy looks even more anxious and unhappy.

SAMMY

It's like we got parachuted into the land of the giant sequoia people.

REGGIE

Alright.

She forcefully shoves aside the towering JOCKS blocking the walkway, clearing a path to the school.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

'Scuse me. 'Scuse me.

They move aside, laughing. More amused than insulted. Natalie and Sammy follow Reggie into the school.

100

INT. THE GYM, GRAND VIEW HIGH SCHOOL, SARATOGA - DAY

100

A boys' PE class, 24 BOYS, ages 16-18, is engaged in a robust game of volleyball.

COACH

Up and over, nice dig, Adam Johnson!

Sammy is on one team, surrounded by boys who seem much taller, stronger, more aggressive, and it seems like all of them are blonds. Sammy tries to participate but the game mainly goes on above his head.

PLAYERS

Set set set! / Get up! / Okay! / I got it!

Sammy is aggressively bumped aside by a teammate.

COACH

Way to get up!

From the opposing team comes a powerful spike by LOGAN HALL, golden-haired, very handsome, tall, the school's star athlete.

COACH (CONT'D)

Nice, Logan! Do it again, go again.
Good work, guys. Keep the intensity, keep moving.
(as the next point begins)
Rotate! Nice dig! Good job!

CHAD THOMAS, a short, muscular boy near the net on the opposite team, leaps and deliberately spikes the volleyball as hard as he can straight at Sammy. Sammy involuntarily crouches, the ball painfully bouncing off his crossed arms.

COACH (CONT'D)

Fabelman, it won't hurt ya. It's a volleyball not a cannon ball!!

His teammates look at Sammy with contempt. Chad smirks at him with cold, alarming eyes. Logan calls to his teammate.

LOGAN
Let's go, serve.

COACH
Good reactions! Let's move!

Determined to make up for his earlier disgrace, Sammy sees the ball coming in low over the net. He moves to the front, then crouches and leaps as high as he can, swinging wildly with all his might, missing the ball but whacking Logan, on the other side of the net, hard on the top of his head. Logan sways, grabbing his head in pain.

LOGAN
OWW!!!

Everyone rushes forward.

SAMMY
Oh my god, I'm so sorry!

Suddenly Chad lunges at Sammy, snarling. He grabs Sammy's shirt; it tears at the neck.

CHAD
I'm gonna murder you ya piece of
shit!!

The coach pulls Chad back. He struggles in his arms until -

LOGAN
Hey Chad!

Chad stops immediately, looking at Logan.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
Cool it.

Chad calms, shrugs off the coach, and stalks away. Sammy comes under the net to apologize to Logan.

SAMMY
I am - I did NOT mean to do that.
Are you okay?

LOGAN
(low, to Sammy:)
That really hurt. Asshole.

COACH
(chuckling)
Watch your mouth, Logan.

LOGAN
(to Sammy:)
Go fetch the ball.

Sammy turns. The ball is several feet behind him.

SAMMY
Sure, yeah...

COACH
Let's go.

Sammy runs towards the ball, the other boys whispering and snickering. Sammy's foot gets to the ball before his hands do, and he accidentally kicks it twenty feet away. The other boys find this hilarious. Sammy chases the ball, cursing under his breath.

101

CUT TO: 101

The locker room. Sammy sits, alone, in front of his locker, humiliated and dejected. He hears Chad's wheedling voice:

CHAD
Hey. New kid! What's your name?

Sammy looks up. Chad arrives in front of him, Logan behind him in his letterman jacket.

SAMMY
Sam.

CHAD
Sam *What?*

SAMMY
(a beat:)
Fabelman.

CHAD
(to Logan:)
Told you he's a kike.

LOGAN
(to Sammy:)
He doesn't like Jews.

CHAD
Nobody likes Jews.

LOGAN
(to Sammy:)
Except other Jews, right?

CHAD
So Bagel Man -

SAMMY
No, that's not my name. Don't call
me that.

CHAD
So, you gave my best friend a
concussion, Bagel Man.

SAMMY
No I didn't. Leave me alone -

Sammy starts to stand; Chad slams him back on the bench, then
leans in, glaring crazily:

CHAD
Hey! Don't argue with me! A *serious*
concussion. So how do we make you
pay? How about this? You're
drinking from the fountain. You
never hear me come up from behind
you... And BAM!
(miming a blunt blow with
his palm:)
I shatter your front teeth all over
the spigot.

Logan, laughing, revolted, pushes Chad away from Sammy; then
Logan leans down to Sammy. Sammy flinches, eyes down.

LOGAN
(indicating Chad:)
Hey, look at me. He's demented.
Like, medically. So watch out for
yourself.

Sammy looks up at Logan, who grins - could be friendly, or
malicious, certainly dazzling.

102

EXT. THE RENTAL HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

102

Sammy is about to open the front door when he stops, hearing
his sisters screaming and glass breaking inside.

103

INT. THE RENTAL HOUSE, LOS GATOS - LATE AFTERNOON

103

Sammy opens the door to find Mitzi's on the floor, frantically trying to assemble a metal cage, the directions open amid bolts, nuts and washers. A lightbulb rockets past her and shatters against the front door that Sammy's holding open. He ducks to avoid the flying glass.

REGGIE

Close the door!!!

Lisa and Natalie cower behind the sofa, while Reggie stands atop a step ladder under the chandelier. Above her, a brown capuchin monkey is clinging to the living room chandelier, unscrewing light bulbs and flinging them at the girls. There are still packing boxes everywhere, and the piano remains mummified.

LISA

Mom got a monkey!

SAMMY

Why'd you get a MONKEY?

MITZI

'Cause I needed to laugh.

The monkey throws another lightbulb at Natalie, who catches it. The monkey leaps down to the couch and clambers onto Natalie's shoulders. She shrieks.

MITZI (CONT'D)

(to Sammy:)

Help me with this! The directions don't make any sense!!

The monkey leaps from Natalie to the window drapes! Reggie is off the ladder and at the drapes. She starts shaking them. The monkey holds on for dear life, screeching. Natalie races to the kitchen.

NATALIE

I'll get a banana!

MITZI

Don't tear the curtains, they're rented!

The cage falls apart in Mitzi's hands. Then the curtains come down on Reggie.

The front door opens and Burt walks in. He's bemused by the sight of Mitzi on the floor with the half-built cage. The

monkey leaps to Burt's shoulder. He wraps his long hairy arms around Burt's head, knocking off his hat.

BURT

Oh!

The monkey starts playing with Burt's hair.

BURT (CONT'D)

(feigning calm)

Hello. Who are you?

MITZI

He's mine.

Burt's quizzical, Mitzi defiant.

LISA

What are we gonna call him?

Everyone looks at Mitzi.

MITZI

Bennie. His name's Bennie.

Burt stares hard at Mitzi. The monkey licks his cheek.

104

CUT TO: 104

Mitzi's and Burt's bedroom, crowded with unpacked boxes, unhappy-looking.

MITZI (CONT'D)

I don't want to see a psychiatrist,
Burt.

BURT

You're scaring the kids. You're
sleeping all day -

MITZI

I miss the desert. I miss dry heat.

BURT (O.S.)

You haven't even unwrapped the
piano. You aren't cooking, or
shopping or unpacking.

105

CUT TO: 105

In the dark kitchen, Sammy, on the floor, listens to Burt and Mitzi's argument, floating in through a heating vent.

MITZI (O.S.)

Psychiatrists help you know why you're feeling something. They can't help you feel something different.

BURT (O.S.)

You're behaving like when your mother died.

106

CUT BACK TO: 106

Mitzi's and Burt's bedroom.

BURT (CONT'D)

Like you're in mourning. But... Nobody's died.

Mitzi stares at him for a long moment, till he looks away.

MITZI

Okay... so we'll call the monkey some other name.

BURT

(a beat, then, quietly,
scared:)

IBM's out of his league, Mitts. Bennie was - he *is* my best friend. But they don't need him. This is what I know. I don't need him either.

He waits for a response. She remains silent, looking at her hands.

MITZI

Bennie wasn't your friend.
(she looks up at Burt:)
But you knew he was mine.

Fighting to keep his face fixed and inexpressive, he takes in what she's just told him, then he nods.

107

CUT BACK TO: 107

Reggie has joined Sammy by the vent. She looks at him, shocked.

REGGIE

What does *that* mean?

Sammy shakes his head and says nothing. Just closes the vent.

108 INT. GRAND VIEW HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

108

CU on the locker door. Sammy's hand opens the locker. Inside there's a bagel dangling from a string. Written with a felt pen on the bagel: **JEW-HOLE**

Sammy pulls at the bagel; it breaks in pieces in his hands, leaving the string dangling.

A109

CUT TO: A109

A walkway. Sammy walks among them, warily, his eyes peeled for Logan and Chad and their gang. Parched, he stops at a long drinking fountain with three spigots. He hesitates before taking a drink, remembering Chad's threat. Since no one threatening is nearby, he decides to go for it. He bends down to take a drink; just as he does, another boy bends in to drink. This startles Sammy who jumps away.

109

CUT TO: 109

Sammy enters a stairwell. He passes a poster advertising **SENIOR YEAR DITCH DAY!!! VOLUNTEERS WANTED!!!** Among the activities for which volunteers are wanted: **PHOTOGRAPHERS!!** Sammy is studying this, thinking, when he hears sounds coming from below:

A boy moans, a girl moans, then the sounds of French kissing. Sammy tiptoes down a few steps, then cautiously leans over the railing to see who's making these sounds. Unable to see, he descends further, treading very quietly.

Finally he can see a couple making out: a red-haired GIRL and Logan, rubbing against her, kissing her, his hands all over her sweater.

RED-HAIRED GIRL

Logan, I'm really, really missing you.

Sammy's transfixed, prurient and horny, till it registers how dangerous this situation is. He starts to climb up again, but trips, one knee striking a stair tread.

SAMMY

OW!!!

The girl pushes Logan off, straightening her clothes.

LOGAN

HEY!! Who's there? Who's there!?

But Sammy has already sprinted up and out of the stairwell.

110

EXT. BEHIND GRAND VIEW HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

110

Sammy exits out the back of the building, covered by an awning. Then he stops abruptly as Chad appears from behind the last of the awning's vertical supports.

CHAD

Bagel Man! Yo!!

Sammy turns to run back in the opposite direction, just as four track jocks come out the rear door, followed by Logan with his arm around a beautiful blonde girl, CLAUDIA. She's wearing his letter sweater.

CHAD (CONT'D)

(to Sammy:)

I left you a little snack in your locker. Didja like it?

Sammy is torn between an intense desire to murder this creep and fear of being slaughtered.

ONE OF THE JOCKS

Guess he wasn't hungry.

LOGAN

He said - He said it was -
(to Chad:)
What'd you call it, Chad?

CHAD

Kosher!

CLAUDIA

Knock it off, moron.
(to Logan:)
We talked about this.

LOGAN

(to the jocks:)
Come on, we'll be late for practice.

Sammy moves to leave, but Claudia steps in front of him.

CLAUDIA

(to Sammy:)
So what is this, you're Jewish?

Sammy stares at Claudia, unable to talk - she's beautiful, he's humiliated and scared. Chad hoots in delight and says to Logan:

SAMMY

Well...

CHAD

Holy crap, he's got the hots so bad
he can't even talk to her!

SAMMY

NO I DON'T!

CHAD

(To Sammy:)
Apologize to her.

SAMMY

For what?

CHAD

For making googoo eyes at her, for
drooling at her!

SAMMY

I wasn't drooling at her.

CHAD

Then apologize to her for killing
Christ!

Logan and the jocks find this funny.

CLAUDIA

(to Logan, angry:)
Why are you encouraging him?

CHAD

(to Sammy:)
Go on! Apologize to her for killing
Our Lord!

Claudia starts to leave. Logan grabs her hand.

LOGAN

Don't go. Come watch me run.

CLAUDIA

No thanks, I'm not in the mood now.

LOGAN

Aww, please? I run better when you
are there.

CHAD

APOLOGIZE TO HER YOU CHRIST-KILLING
SONOFABITCH!!

CLAUDIA
(to Logan:)
I'm going home.

Logan steps in between Chad and Sammy. Grinning, he says to Sammy:

LOGAN
Go on and say sorry, you're getting
me in trouble with my girl.

Sammy looks at Logan for a beat, nods, then turns to Claudia.

SAMMY
You know, obviously since I'm not
two thousand years old and I've
never been to Rome, I'm not
apologizing.
(turning to Claudia)
But hey, you know maybe, uh, your
boyfriend should apologize to you
for making out in the stairwell
half an hour ago with some red-
head.

Everyone freezes. Logan turns immediately to Claudia who looks stricken. He flashes his signature smile.

LOGAN
He's lying. He's - I didn't do
that. I swear.

CLAUDIA
You told me you were finished with
her. Logan, you lied to me!

Again he tries to speak, but Claudia tears off his letter sweater, throws the sweater on the sodden ground with his books and runs. Logan starts to follow, then stops. He picks up the sweater and stands, holding it.

LOGAN
Claudia...

The others watch him. Then Logan turns towards Sammy.

CHAD
Ooooooooooh...

Holding the sweater, Logan charges at Sammy and punches him hard in nose, knocking Sammy flat against the asphalt.

Logan stands over Sammy, breathing hard, his face contorted. Sammy covers his nose, spurting blood, holding up the other hand protectively. Logan slaps Sammy's upheld hand away.

LOGAN

You made a mistake.

Sammy defensively raises his hand again; Logan slaps it away.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

LISTEN. TO. ME. You made a mistake and you're gonna fix it. Tomorrow -

CHAD

Bash his head in!

LOGAN

(savagely:)

SHUT UP, CHAD, GODDAMN IT.

(back to Sammy:)

Tomorrow you're gonna find her, first thing, and you're gonna tell her you were lying. Say you were, um, scared. Say - say whatever you gotta say, but you tell her it wasn't true and you did not see me doing that, or I swear I will hurt you worse than you've ever been hurt.

Logan leans in.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

(hissing:)

You get me? Nod to show you dig what I'm saying.

Sammy nods. Logan stands and walks away. The other jocks follow him. Sammy is left on the ground as the tears come.

111

INT. THE RENTAL HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

111

Mitzi opens the door for Burt. She's already on the war path. Sammy is slumped on the couch, his eyes and his bandaged nose swelling and purple, clothes stained with blood.

MITZI

He won't tell me who did this!! Ask him who did this!!

(to Sammy:)

Tell your father who did this and he will drive to that little shit's

house and he will beat the living
crap out of him!

BURT
Is your nose broken?

MITZI
Of course it's not broken, you
think I'd be sitting here if his
nose was broken -

BURT
(to Sammy:)
Who hit you?

SAMMY
What do you care who it was? It's
not like you'll do anything about
it.

BURT
Tell me what happened first.

SAMMY
(he goes off:)
What happened is *I hate it here!*
And what happened is you brought us
here, because -

BURT
Because I got a better job, so we
moved.

SAMMY
(jumping to his feet:)
You don't even *care* where you are,
you get to go to work and that
could be in Iceland! You're working
with your goddamn machines so you
get to be happy while the rest of
us are miser-

Mitzi tries to put the ice pack against Sammy's nose which
has started to bleed again. Sammy bats it away.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
Don't!!

MITZI
You're bleeding on the carpet!

SAMMY
It's a rental house!!

Sammy snatches the ice pack from her and, still furious, he turns back to Burt.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Do you even notice how much we hate it here where, where we're practically the only Jewish people for *miles*, and everything is *awful*?! Do you even care that this is *your fault*, everything that's happening now, just because you ran away from home and took all of us with you?!

BURT

(getting angry:)

I came here so I could work ten times harder with ten times the responsibility which seems to have escaped everybody's notice -

MITZI

Could everyone settle, I wanna say something.

BURT (CONT'D)

- so I could build us a nice home and a -

SAMMY

You didn't come here to build houses. You didn't come here to work. You ran away!

BURT

(snapping:)

I think you have something to say to me, Sammy, and if I'm right about that, then get it off your chest and say it to my face!

Mitzy climbs onto the piano bench to seize focus.

MITZI

(loud:)

I started therapy!

Burt and Sammy stop and stare at her. She stares back. Sammy storms out. Burt slumps into a chair and Mitzi lays back on the piano, both drained.

112

CUT TO: 112

Sammy's in his bedroom, so filled with rage he doesn't know what to do with himself. Lying in bed, he stares at the shadows on the bedroom wall, created by a streetlight, of leaves on a tree outside, moved by a strong breeze.

A light rain begins to fall; Sammy looks at the shadows of the raindrops streaming down the wall, intermingling with the leaves. He raises his hand and watches its shadow move among the shifting lines made by the light streaming through the rain-streaked window.

Grief, anger and terror rise up in him; he's frightened at the size of his feelings. He breathes, starting to panic. He tries to calm himself by focusing on the shadows of the swirling leaves and streaming water.

He sits up suddenly, then kneels on the floor and from underneath his bed he pulls the box containing the Bolex H-8 Reflex camera. He opens the box and lifts the brand-new camera for the first time, examines it. He puts it to his ear. He pushes the release button. Closing his eyes, listening to the whirr of the camera's motor.

113

EXT. GRAND VIEW HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY - MORNING

113

CU on Claudia, hurt, angry, listening unsympathetically. She sits next to her friend MONICA SHERWOOD, shorter, pretty, indignant, intrigued.

Sammy sits across from them, two black eyes, swollen nose.

SAMMY

Anyways, what I really wanted to say is that - about yesterday - what I told you was... It wasn't true and I lied. And...I'm sorry.

CLAUDIA

But... Why? What did I ever do to you?

SAMMY

Oh no no, it wasn't about you. No I didn't mean to hurt you.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

Because that like really, really wasn't cool, y'know?

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

Because I really love Logan.

MONICA

Yeah, she cried herself to sleep, thinking he cheated on her. You ought to be more considerate of other people's feelings.

SAMMY

Okay, but Logan told me to say I killed Christ.

MONICA

I can't imagine my life without Him!

SAMMY

Well, we've managed for like 5,000 years, so I guess it's possible.

MONICA

Maybe we could, I dunno, get together? And pray on it?

SAMMY

(laughing nervously)
What, like... You and me?

She smiles warmly at him. Sammy is speechless.

MONICA

We can ask Him to come into your heart. And, y'know, see what happens.

SAMMY

Uh, yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah...
(to Monica:)
Sure! That'd be like, when? Like today?!

114

INT. MONICA'S BEDROOM, LOS GATOS - AFTERNOON

114

CU on a big poster of Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount, beautiful face, long flowing hair.

Jesus is surrounded by Paul McCartney, John Lennon, another Jesus poster, JFK photos, another Jesus, Troy Donahue, yet another Jesus, Tab Hunter, Eddie Kookie Burns, Pat Boone and a few more Jesuses. Sammy inspects the posters.

MONICA

It's a lot, huh?

SAMMY

It's... sort of a shrine, almost. A shrine to guys. Lots of guys.

MONICA

They're sexy.

SAMMY

I guess.

Sammy moves to take in Claudia's bed. Above it is a HUGE crucifix, encircled by a heart of red Christmas lights.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I mean, not Jesus.

MONICA

Jesus is sexy.

SAMMY

(a little shocked:)

Isn't that like a sin or something?

MONICA

I dunno. He came to us as a man. A handsome young man. He could've come as a girl, or an old man, or someone with leprosy. But...

She's standing directly in front of him.

SAMMY

Nobody knows what he really looked like.

MONICA

Probably he looked like you.

SAMMY

(perplexed, then:)

Oh, because, because he was -

MONICA

Jewish. A handsome Jewish boy. Just like you.

She suddenly steps away to close her bedroom door, then moves back to Sammy with a sly smile.

Sammy makes a slight move forward, unsure but deciding to try for a kiss. Monica puts two fingers in sacerdotal position between their lips.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Let's pray.

Monica kneels down in front of him. He has no idea what to do. She reaches up, takes his shoulders, and pulls him to his knees. She presses her palms together in front of her.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Close your eyes.

Sammy obeys. Monica takes a deep breath.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Lord, I'm here with my friend Sammy-

SAMMY

Sam.

MONICA

I'm here with my good friend Sam,
who's Jewish and he's a nice boy,
Lord Jesus, he's good and brave and
he's funny, Lord, and, and I like
him.

She opens her eyes and takes Sammy's hand. He resists,
puzzled, and she tries to shake him loose.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Relax.

Monica quickly moves Sammy's hand to make the sign of the
cross.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Ask.

Sammy looks confused.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Ask Him to come unto you, ask him
to enter you.

SAMMY

(at the ceiling, clearing
his throat:)

Um... Hi there, Jesus, it's me, Sam
Fabelman. If you're real, show me a
sign or something and -

MONICA

You can't ask Jesus to do tricks to
impress you. You have to be humble,
you have to beg him to - I'll do
it.

(inching closer to Sammy:)

I'm going to beg the Holy Spirit to
come into me, I'm going to draw the
Spirit in with my breath.

(a beat:)

SPIRIT! COME INTO ME! PLEASE, HOLY
SPIRIT, I'M BEGGING YOU, SWEET HOLY
FATHER, FOR THE SAKE OF MY FRIEND
SAMMY -

SAMMY
 Sam. MONICA (CONT'D)
 - COME INTO US, JESUS!! HEAR
 OUR PRAYER!!

She sucks in a huge volume of air, then, holding her breath:

MONICA (CONT'D)
 Open your mouth, open your mouth
 and take the spirit of Christ into
 you!

Sammy opens his mouth. Monica, her eyes closed, brings her face right up to his and exhales powerfully. Sammy drinks in her breath. As he's doing this he opens his eyes, and she opens hers. They look into each others' eyes, and they kiss.

Monica pulls back and crosses herself. Sammy awkwardly tries to copy her.

A moment later, Monica pushes Sammy down on the bedspread, gets on top and bends down to kiss him. Sammy looks up at Jesus, crucified, looming above.

MONICA'S MOTHER (O.C.)
 Monica? Sammy?
 (singsong:)
 I made snaaaaacks!

Monica devours Sammy with kisses. Immediately there's a knock on the door. Monica leaps off Sammy and Sammy jumps up. Both straighten their clothes as:

MONICA
 WE'RE COMING!
 (to Sammy:)
 Tomorrow after school, wanna meet
 out back behind the bleachers?

SAMMY
 Yeah!

MONICA
 Cool! We can pray some more.

118

INT. THE DINING ROOM IN THE RENTAL HOUSE - EVENING

118

The Fabelmans sit around the dinner table with their guests: Hadassah, older but her dress is a little more modern; and Monica. Bennie the monkey sits by Burt's plate; Burt feeds him a cherry tomatoes from his salad, spearing them on his fork one by one. Hadassah stares at the monkey with horror; Monica stares at him with astonishment as she listens to Mitzi:

MITZI

When I was a girl and I felt sad,
I'd go to the zoo and I'd watch the
monkeys.

MONICA

They made you laugh?

MITZI

Yeah, the monkeyshines. But there
was more to it than that, it was...

She looks at Bennie the monkey.

MITZI (CONT'D)

(To Monica:)

They understand what we've done to
them, with the cages and the people
pointing. We share that with them,
the truth of how cruel people are.
But if you watch them for long
enough, you can tell they know
stuff we can't begin to imagine,
important stuff. And they're not
going to let us in on it. Because
it belongs to them, it's their own
monkey business, theirs. It's not
ours. It's, oh I dunno...

BURT

Self-possession.

Mitzi looks at him, an instant of deep connection. She gives
him a sad smile.

MITZI

Right. They belong to themselves.

She hears what she's saying, and she turns away from Burt. He
stares at her, hurt by the abrupt severing.

HADASSAH

If it belongs to itself, let it go
back to where it came from.

MITZI

(to Monica:)

Anyway, that's how come I got a
monkey.

NATALIE

And a therapist.

LISA
(to Monica:)
He throws his poop.

MONICA
The therapist?

LISA
No the monkey.

HADASSAH
(to Monica:)
That's why I'm staying in a hotel.

BURT
You don't have to. We have plenty
of room -

HADASSAH
(to Monica:)
My rabbi in New Jersey says a
monkey in the house isn't Kosher.

MITZI
That's why we're not going to eat
him.

BURT
(to Mitzi:)
Did you schedule him for his polio
vaccine?

MONICA
They can get polio?

MITZI
(to Natalie:)
Pass the peas.
(to Monica:)
He hates going to the vet.

BURT
Well, they're susceptible to
pretty much everything humans
are, so yes.

MITZI (CONT'D)
You see, Monica, in this family,
it's the scientists versus the
artists. Sammy's on my team, he
takes after me, except he's got
real talent.

SAMMY
Mom.

Natalie

And he's completely terrible at science.

REGGIE
And algebra.

NATALIE
And sports.

SAMMY
Will you please stop!

MONICA
He showed me his camera.

NATALIE
Is he good at kissing?

MONICA
I'll tell you later.

Reggie and Natalie crack up.

SAMMY
SHUT. UP.

MITZI
(to Monica:)
He sleeps with a camera under his pillow -

SAMMY
No I don't!

MITZI
- but he refuses to actually shoot anything.

MONICA
(a gasp, a GREAT idea!)
He should shoot Ditch Day!
(to Sammy:)
They still don't have a photographer. You could volunteer!

MITZI
What's Ditch Day?

SAMMY
It doesn't matter, I'm not going.

REGGIE
(to Mitzi:)
It's a thing the Seniors get to do at the end of the year.

MONICA

(to Mitzi:)

They let us pretend like we're ditching school and we all take buses to Santa Cruz Main Beach.

(to Sammy:)

You have to go, everyone goes! My dad'll lend you his camera, it's super-fancy, costs like a thousand dollars. It's called like a... an Air something? I forget.

SAMMY

(a beat, then:)

Wait. Not an Arriflex.

MONICA

Right!

SAMMY

Your dad owns a 16 millimeter Arriflex?!? Wow, wow, okay...

MONICA

(to Mitzi:)

Usually it's a teacher who shoots the Ditch Day movie and it's a big joke, but -

(to Sammy:)

My dad'll get the school to pay for it.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

But 16MM raw stock, two minutes forty-five seconds a roll at ten bucks a roll, for a whole day, that'd be like insanely expensive -

HADASSAH

I owe you a graduation check.

SAMMY

- And I'd need to rent a 16MM editing machine, I have no idea how much that costs, so -

MONICA

My dad will rent one for you.

MITZI

We can rent it. Whatever it costs.

(to Burt:)

Right? Burt?

BURT

(to Sammy:)

Uh, what's wrong with your Bolex?

MITZI

(to Burt:)

You could afford to be a little encouraging.

BURT

About what?

MITZI

About him making movies again.

BURT

Maybe he's moved on.

SAMMY

Well, I didn't say that! I just -

MITZI

On from what?

BURT

He hasn't picked up his camera once since we got here. He'll be going to college in September, maybe his feelings about it have changed. He's growing up. I'm enthusiastic about *that*.

MITZI

Filming is what he loves, and I don't think him *abandoning* what he truly loves is something we should celebrate. Do you? I'd think that you more than anyone would have some understanding of what a, a *vocation*, a *calling* is!

SAMMY

Oh Jesus Christ!
(to Monica:)
I'm sorry.
(to Mitzi:)
Guys, can we please stop talking about me?
(to Monica:)
Let's go to your place or something, maybe your dad can show me the camera -

BURT

(trying to make light of it, but underneath he's angry:)
Alright, alright, we'll rent him the equipment!

REGGIE

(to Monica:)

He hates the beach, that's why he doesn't want to go to Ditch Day.

MITZI

(to Burt:)

But it's not *your* calling. Is that why you can't, um, respect it?

BURT
I have respect for everything he
works hard doing!

REGGIE
He's afraid.

NATALIE
(to Monica:)
He's scared if he does those guys
will beat him up again.

As the argument continues, the monkey moves from Burt to
Mitzi, and Hadassah asks Sammy, who ignores her:

SAMMY
What? No I'm not! I never said that
I was scared of them!

HADASSAH
You got beat up?!

MITZI
(to Burt:)
You always dismiss what he does,
what anyone does that's playful or
imaginative as a pastime or a hobby-

BURT
You already won, Mitts. I
surrendered. I'm not taking the
bait.

MITZI
(to Burt:)
Who's baiting who? I said I'd
take him for his polio shot
the first five times you
asked me. Didn't I?

SAMMY
(to his parents:)
Can you guys please cut it
out! You're embarrassing me!

BURT
Well, you say you will but I guess
you don't mean it. So I ask again,
and again, and -

MITZI
He's scared of shots! He's scared
of the doctor -

Bennie the monkey, scared by the anger, jumps into Hadassah's
lap Sammy stands up abruptly and slams the table!

SAMMY

I am taking the goddamned monkey to
the vet! Okay?!

Hadassah scratches Bennie's head.

HADASSAH

He probably needs a tranquilizer
with all this yelling.

Sammy looks at his family, then smiles; an idea is forming.
He says to Monica:

SAMMY

Can you ask your dad about
borrowing the camera?

MONICA

He'll say yes.

SAMMY

Thank you! I'm filming Ditch Day. I
think it's a great idea.

Over this: the calliope intro to James Darren's "Goodbye
Cruel World."

119

EXT. SANTA CRUZ MAIN BEACH - DAY

119

"Goodbye Cruel World" plays as Sammy, wielding Monica's dad's
Arriflex 16-S, arrives at the beach, where a massive banner
welcomes "GRAND VIEW HIGH CLASS OF '64". Monica rushes to
join him, carrying a shoulder rig for the camera.

The students have fanned out across the beach. They're
swimming, sunning, chasing each other, building sand castles
and burying each other in the sand. Sammy, Monica assisting,
films all of this.

Students use beach blankets to playfully toss a girl back and
forth while Sammy films and Monica cheers.

Sammy notices Logan, in a lively game of beach volleyball,
leaping high in the air and spiking a ball.

At a long table, Sammy films several students having a hot
dog-eating contest.

Monica and some sunbathers stage a gag for Sammy. Monica
stands directly above one of the sunbathers, then drops a
small glob of vanilla ice cream onto his forehead.

Late afternoon, golden light. In the parking lot an improvised circular track of traffic cones and trash cans, the perimeter surrounded by students, cheering as the strongest athletes in the class race each other. Logan, naturally, is winning. Sammy kneels and pans to follow Logan with his camera.

Sammy films Claudia and Monica passing under a limbo bar together. Logan watches from the crowd and catches Claudia's eye, but she turns her back on him. But when Logan goes under the bar next, Claudia can't help but watch. She walks off and Monica goes to drape herself on Sammy as he keeps filming. She nuzzles into his cheek until he gets the hint and lets her peer through the viewfinder.

122

CUT TO: 122

123

EXT. 8MM FOOTAGE: THE NEW HOUSE IN SARATOGA - DAY

123

It's cloudy and silent, with only the whirr of the camera heard under the footage.

Sammy, behind the lens, heads up the walkway to the front door. Burt, Reggie, Natalie and Lisa are excited. Mitzi glances at the house's unfinished exterior, promising to become a handsome, generously-proportioned A-Frame. She looks away, out at the view.

The girls rush inside, followed by Burt and the camera. It follows the girls, exploring - the boxed appliances in the kitchen, the hall leading to their new rooms. Then the camera pans to the front window, where Mitzi stands looking in. Burt knocks and waves to her and gestures to Sammy to shoot her. Burt plants a big kiss on Mitzi then runs into the expansive, sun-soaked living room, miming where her grand piano will live. The girls run back in and Burt lines them up in the living room and has Sammy frame the front door.

He rushes outside and sweeps Mitzi in his arms like a bride, silhouetted by the strong sun behind them. As Burt carries Mitzi over the threshold, towards the camera, their faces growing distinct, the film slows down till it advances one frame at a time; then finally it freezes on a frame of Burt, happy and proud, and Mitzi, staring at the camera with a sad, lost smile.

125

INT. THE RENTAL HOUSE, LOS GATOS - MORNING

125

Burt steps into frame with a sad, gentle look.

BURT
Don't be scared.

The kids are seated on the sofa. Lisa is holding Bennie the monkey. She's crying, as is Reggie. Natalie scowls fiercely.

BURT (CONT'D)
Your mom misses Phoenix too much -

Mitzi sits on the piano bench, tears in her eyes:

MITZI
(softly, not looking at anyone, to Burt:) Tell them the truth.

BURT (CONT'D)
- and I can't leave, this is where my work is, I have to -

NATALIE
That's crazy! You don't, you can't ruin *everything* because -
(to Mitzi:) - you miss one place and -
(to Burt:) - you're stuck someplace else!

MITZI
I miss Bennie too much.

NATALIE
(a beat, shocked; then:)
So? We all miss him.

Sammy sits alone on the stairs, watching Mitzi.

MITZI
This is a different kind of missing.

NATALIE
Because what? You love Bennie?

No one answers her.

LISA
Don't you love daddy?

MITZI
Of course I love daddy.

BURT
Sure she does, and I love mom, that's not -

NATALIE
WHY IS THIS ALL OF A SUDDEN HAPPENING??

REGGIE

Stay together. You love each other
and you love us, and we don't want
this, we don't want to have to move
back and forth and not live with
both of you, we can't! Dad, we
can't -

Natalie leaps from the sofa to confront Mitzi.

NATALIE

(to Mitzi, red with rage:)
YOU'RE ALWAYS SO MEAN TO HIM!!
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE GETTING DIVORCED!
IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU!!

BURT

Don't blame your mom. This
wasn't her idea, it was mine.

MITZI

No, don't say that, that's -

NATALIE

(to Burt:)
NO IT WASN'T YOUR IDEA!! SHE JUST
SAID IT WAS BECAUSE OF BENNIE! SO
STOP LYING!! BOTH OF YOU STOP
LYING!!

BURT

I'm giving your mom a chance to go
back to Phoenix to live...

Sammy takes it all in, numbed and disconnected. He sees the
drama playing out in the mirror over the mantle. In the
reflection, he sees HIMSELF filming everything, moving
through his family like they're actors.

127

INT. SAMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

127

Sammy is working at a rented 16MM editor, surrounded by film,
a tape recorder, tapes, a record player, 45s rpms. Labeled
film strips are taped to the walls. Sammy has Jimmy Soul's
"If You Wanna Be Happy" playing for inspiration. Reggie
comes in. Sammy looks up at her, stop the music, then goes
back to his editing.

REGGIE

I don't understand how you can go
back to your beach blanket movie
after that.

SAMMY

We're different, I guess.

He works. Reggie goes to sit on his bed, then:

REGGIE

Is she gonna marry Bennie?

SAMMY

If she wants to, she will, she's the most selfish person on earth.

REGGIE

It must've been hard for her, married to a... a genius.

SAMMY

Dad worships Mom.

REGGIE

OK - But maybe it's hard, being worshipped by someone you know you'll never be as good as, or ever do anything as good as. She laughs at Bennie's jokes, but...
(she shakes her head:)
Dad's always been her best audience.

Reggie starts to cry.

SAMMY

Come on. She'll be fine, she'll tell herself everything happens for a reason, she'll make excuses like she always -

REGGIE

You're way more selfish than her.

Sammy, confused, tries to laugh it off.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

That's why you're angry at her. It's because she's scared. Just like you, Sammy. Out of everyone in this outta-control falling-apart family, the one who's most like Mitzi is you.

Reggie waits for Sammy to respond. He looks down and doesn't say anything. So Reggie stands and starts to leave the room.

SAMMY

Wait.

Reggie stops and turns to him.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Before I show this to the whole school, could you please watch it with me?

Reggie nods yes. She goes to Sammy, puts her hands on his shoulders and leans in. He pushes the button and the film starts to play.

128 EXT. THE GRAND VIEW HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT 128

Sammy pulls up in the family car, Monica beside him. All around them, students are exiting their cars in prom dresses and tuxes. Colorful lights from the prom illuminate the big gym window.

129 CUT TO: 129

Inside the car, Sammy in a suit and tie reaches behind to get something on the back seat. Monica, in a big baby-blue prom dress, beehive hair, lifts a can of hair spray.

MONICA

Hold your breath!

She sprays her hair, blasting Sammy, blinding him. He frantically rolls down the window to get some air. Coughing, but smiling, he reaches into the back seat for a box containing a corsage.

SAMMY

(blindly holding the box out to Monica:)

Here!

MONICA

(taking it:)

Oh wow!!!

She opens the box and lifts out the corsage. A gold chain is pinned to the base of the corsage; Monica, confused, surprised, lifts the flower until, at the end of chain, a small gold crucifix swings free of the box. Monica looks at it, not knowing how to react. She looks at Sammy.

MONICA (CONT'D)

(a beat, then, shyly:)

Did you find Jesus?

SAMMY

(deadpanning:)

In a jewelry store.

She stares at him, then she laughs and throws her arms around his neck and kisses him.

130

INT. THE GYM, GRAND VIEW HIGH - NIGHT

130

All the Senior Prom glitz and glamor the student organizing committee could muster. On a raised platform at one end of the gym, Claudia in a sparkly prom dress, is singing "Walk On By," accompanied by ten student MUSICIANS, including the nearsighted accompanist at the keyboards and a TRUMPET PLAYER, struggling with his exposed six-note solo. Behind the band, a banner announces the theme - "Reaching for the Stars" - in glitter letters. Passing by the stage, Logan stares up at Claudia, his look of hopeless yearning making it clear they're not back together. She sings out, ignoring him.

Sammy and Monica are slow dancing, her head on his shoulder. She's wearing the corsage and the crucifix. She looks very happy. Sammy looks burdened.

SAMMY

So in September when I move to LA.
I'm gonna try to get work in a
movie studio.

MONICA

I thought you were going to
college?

SAMMY

Could you - Would you ever consider
coming with me?

Monica raises her head and looks at him.

MONICA

I'm going to Texas A&M. You know
that.

SAMMY

Yes, I do. But I thought maybe you
should change your mind. Because...

MONICA

Because what?

SAMMY

Because I love you?

MONICA

OW! SAMMY!

He's just stepped on her foot.

SAMMY

I'm sorry! Sorry sorry sorry!

MONICA

That's not...possible!

SAMMY

What? No, it is! Monica, I love you!

MONICA

That's impossible! Sammy -

SAMMY

Sam.

MONICA

We only started dating like -

Monica pulls a little away from him.

MONICA (CONT'D)

Everything was so normal before!
Why're you acting so -

SAMMY

No, because nothing is normal now.
They're getting a divorce.

MONICA

What are you talking about?!

SAMMY

My mom and dad, they're splitting up.

MONICA

Jesus Christ!! This is *Prom!* You can't just *blurt* something out like that at *Prom!*

Monica walks off the dance floor. Sammy follows.

SAMMY

Wait -

Claudia's THREE BACKGROUND SINGERS punctuate the moment with a staccato -

BACKUP SINGERS

Don't! Stop!

Sammy catches up to Monica.

SAMMY

Monica! Look, that's - That's got nothing to do with us, okay! That's not why I said that I love you, I don't know why -

She stops and turns on him.

MONICA

I'm not gonna like change my whole life and move to Hollywood because your parents are having marital difficulties!

Claudia's song continues in the background. Sammy steps away, trying to figure out how to salvage the situation. He returns to find that Monica has taken off the necklace.

MONICA (CONT'D)

You can get a refund. I hardly wore it at all.

She holds it out to him.

SAMMY

Are you breaking up with me?

MONICA

Not at *Prom*, but of course *eventually*.

Monica wraps his hand around the crucifix.

MONICA (CONT'D)

I'm gonna pray on it, and I'm gonna pray really really hard for you, because you are such a fun boy to kiss, but -

Claudia has finished her song and the dancers are applauding her.

Monica stops when the Principal taps the microphone.

PRINCIPAL

Thank you, thank you, wonderful, wonderful! Let's thank our band for that great music!

MONICA

Sometimes we just can't fix things, Sam, and all we can do is suffer.

PRINCIPAL

Now we're going to take a little
break from the dancing for a very
special moment for the Class of
1964 -

Everyone cheers at the mention of the Class of 1964. As the
Principal begins to scan the crowd:

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Mr. Samuel Fabelman, where are
you?!

A follow-spot manned by a kid in the bleachers searches till
it finds Sammy: Ashen and blinking. Blinded, he turns to
where Monica had been standing: She's gone. He looks around
for her, then he looks down at his hand. He's holding the
golden cross as it winks, spinning in the spotlight.

CHAD

BAGEL MAN! BAGEL MAN!

The JOCKS and other kids start to pick up the chant.

PRINCIPAL

There you are!! Okay! Okay. Face
this way. Grab a chair. Let's all
get close to the screen. Right up
front. Very good. Mr. Fabelman,
this is your big moment!! We're
ready to watch your Technicolor
masterpiece: DITCH DAY 1964!

The students cheer. Sammy startles, then, still in a trance,
he heads towards the projector at the rear of the auditorium.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

And as they say way down south in
Hollywoodland: *LIGHTS!!!*

He pantomimes rolling a camera, then catches and corrects
himself.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

LIGHTS!!! CAMERA!!! ACTION!!!!

The auditorium grows dark.

Sammy turns on the reel, which starts to spin. Then he puts
one hand on the projector's light switch and another on the
tape recorder. He flicks both switches simultaneously. The
tape recorder starts playing music - the score for the film,
an amalgam of pop songs and movie scores as the projector's

beam flares up and whites out the whole screen. First up, once more it's Jimmy Soul's "If You Wanna Be Happy".

131

16MM FILM: Title card: **GRAND VIEW HIGH "DITCH DAY"**

131

Dozens of students running into the ocean, diving into waves.

A montage: Swimming; chasing; the hot-dog mouth stuffing contest; dancing; sunbathing; making out - which elicits hoots and cheers from the audience. The audience hoots and cheers at every fun moment.

At the projector, Sammy closes the housing and puts his head in his hands. But slowly, he looks up to watch the movie.

ON THE SCREEN

Two lines square off in a water balloon skirmish. Logan's red-headed stairwell tryst partner (Renee) takes a ballon full in the face. A quick pan catches her assailant (Claudia) mouthing an insincere "Sorry".

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Claudia enjoys the moment all over again, looking past Monica at her side to smirk at Renee.

ON THE SCREEN

Chad sneaks up to an OBLIVIOUS COUPLE and steals their unattended beers.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Chad smiles proudly among his pals, feeling cool.

ON THE SCREEN

Zooming in on a volleyball game. The ball arcs high in the air. Logan, on the other side of the net, crouches down, and then leaps up. As Logan reaches his apogee, his arm starting to swing upwards, the film goes into slow motion; he seems to be floating in space, the sun over his shoulder flaring in the lens, his eyes wide open, his hair windblown. The audience in the gym has gotten completely quiet. Logan's hand, fingers spread wide, meets the ball and grasps it, causing sand stuck to the ball to explode outwards. As he hurls the ball downwards with enormous force, the film speeds up. The ball strikes the beach, scattering players who duck

to avoid it, and all the students, those watching the game in the film and those watching the film in the gym, go crazy!

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Chad and the other jocks slap Logan on the back, congratulating him. But Logan finds he can't enjoy the moment. Something feels off. On the other side of the projector, Sammy watches Logan through the turning reels.

ON THE SCREEN

Chad, beer in hand, starts to sit down on a towel next to a girl. She pulls the towel out from under him, gets up and relocates.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Even more laughter from the crowd as Chad starts to squirm with embarrassment.

ON THE SCREEN

A seagull, hovering. And a new music cue - Chubby Checker's "Limbo Rock". The camera does a vertical swish-pan down from the bird to some sunbathers; a glob of white goo (vanilla ice cream) smacks the boy on his forehead! Screams and laughter and applause from the audience. Now there are two gulls; the camera pans down to the girl, looking up in horror as a blob of white shit hits her right in the eye.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Groans and laughs mix together. One grossed out girl cries out -

GROSSED OUT GIRL

OH NO!

ON THE SCREEN

A veritable flock of gulls. The camera pans down to the other boy, stretching and yawning wide. There's a swell of

anticipation in the crowd before the biggest blob of birdshit yet goes right into his mouth.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

The audience's delights verges over into ecstatic chaos. The last "victim" gleefully pantomimes gobbling up the "birdshit", then stands on his chair to soak up the crowd's adulation. At the projector, Sammy takes it all in.

ON THE SCREEN

Students limbo under the pole, lower and lower. Those who succeed earn applause, those who fail get applause and laughs. Claudia and Monica pass under, Claudia turning away from Logan as he watches from the crowd. Then Logan, doing the impossible, limboing under the pole when it's only a couple of feet above the sand. Sammy's camera angles emphasize the athleticism involved, making this something heroic. The kids in the gym start clapping along with the kids on screen.

Sammy locates and films Chad, walking drunkenly alone at surf's edge, unaware that he's being observed, a pathetic image.

IN THE AUDITORIUM

Chad angrily pushes his way past his crew and out of the room while Logan keeps watching the footage, inscrutable.

The students rise from their chairs, cheering, as the screen shows late afternoon at the improvised track. To the score from *The Captain From Castille*, the track jocks are racing each other, sunlit sand flying up from their feet like sparks. Sammy's filmed this from many angles, and the assemblage is thrilling. Logan's in the lead. He flies past the camera, glistening with sweat, hair streaming, his expression transcendent.

The final lap. Four students stretch a tall barrier of butcher paper across the track's finish line. On the paper, "**CLASS OF 1964.**" They've just pulled the sign taut when Logan explodes through it, ripping it right down the center, arms raised in victory. Wild cheers from the audience on screen and in the gym.

Claudia's eyes are shining. Logan seems confused and overwhelmed, unable to enjoy the cheers of the students around him.

The film cuts immediately to:

The entire class gathered in front of a gorgeous sunset for a group photo. A single title appears above them: **THE END**

132

CUT TO: 132

The gym's lights come on abruptly. The students all around Sammy are cheering, applauding, hooping and hollering; Sammy looks down, hoping not to be noticed. He becomes aware that the crowd is moving. At first it seems to be moving towards him; he looks up and sees that the students are pushing past him, oblivious to him; they're surging towards Logan. Sammy looks around: All the applause and excitement is for Logan, not for him. He looks at Logan, disoriented and unhappy at the center of the attention. Logan's JOCK PALS hoist him on their shoulders. But he squirms in protest.

LOGAN

No! No no...

They put him back on his feet. The crowd parts as Renee walks up to Logan. He looks lost as she approaches him.

RENEE

Logan, you looked so incredible up there. It was amazing.

But Renee is forced to step aside as Claudia confidently approaches. Claudia stares into Logan's eyes, serious and sad, then she kisses him. They embrace. The other kids cheer as...

... Monica pushes through the crowd towards the projector, excitedly looking around for Sammy. But she finds only the projector and the tape recorder running; Sammy is gone. Unable to locate him anywhere, Monica switches off the tape recorder.

133

CUT TO: 133

A hallway, somewhere in the school. Sammy is sitting on the floor, back to a wall of lockers, knees drawn up, head down, the crucifix still dangling from his clenched hand. He keeps his head down as he hears footsteps coming down the hall, then stopping in front of him. Sammy doesn't look up.

LOGAN (O.S.)

Why'd you do that?!

Sammy looks up. Logan is there, agitated, perplexed, angry, suspicious, maybe even afraid. He glares at Sammy, not knowing what to say next. Sammy waits, then:

SAMMY

What?

LOGAN

Why'd you make me look like that?!

SAMMY

In the film?

LOGAN

YES IN THE *FILM*!!

He slams his fist, hard, right into the locker above Sammy's head. Sammy cringes. The loud BOOM!! and the rattling adjoining lockers echo down the hall. Logan grabs his hand, dancing around in pain.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

OOWWWWWWWWWW SHIT SHIT!!!

(to Sammy:)

What's the matter with you?! I've been a, a total asshole to you! I broke your nose! And, and then -

SAMMY

You didn't break my nose, you *almost* did but you didn't break it-

LOGAN (CONT'D)

- then you go and make me look like like that!? What's wrong with you?!

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Logan. All I did was hold the camera and it saw what it saw -

LOGAN

BULLSHIT, Fabelman, you made me look like, like this golden kind of... *THING!*

SAMMY

Yeah?

LOGAN

And Claudia!? She just *kissed me!*

SAMMY

(grim, almost to himself:)
Mazeltov.

LOGAN

In front of the whole school - I treat her shittier than I treat you, and now -

SAMMY (CONT'D)

(he's had enough of this!)
OK great! You're welcome, man! Jesus Ch -

He gets up and starts to walk away. Logan blocks him.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Hey wait, don't go. Don't go.

Sammy stops.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

I wanna know why you did that.

SAMMY

I don't know, I oughta have my head examined.

LOGAN

Am I supposed to feel bad now about all that shit we did to you?

SAMMY

DO you feel bad about it -?

LOGAN

That's none of your goddamn business!

SAMMY

Because you should feel bad about it!

LOGAN

Alright! That's why you did it!!
You want me to feel like crap -

SAMMY

I wanted you to be nice to me for five minutes, or - I did it to make my movie better! I don't know why. You are the biggest jerk I have ever met *in my entire life*, I HAVE A MONKEY AT HOME THAT'S SMARTER THAN YOU, you dumb anti-Semitic ASSHOLE. I made you look like you can fly!!

LOGAN

BUT I CAN'T FLY!! I CAN OUTFLY ANY GUY IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY, AND I WORKED REAL HARD TO DO THAT! But you, you make me feel like I'm some kinda failure or a phony or, or like I'm *supposed* to be some guy I'm never gonna be, not even in my dreams - YOU TOOK THAT GUY WHOEVER HE IS WHEREVER YOU GOT HIM FROM AND

YOU PUT HIM UP THERE ON THAT SCREEN
AND TOLD EVERYONE, *EVERYONE* THAT
THAT'S ME!! AND THAT'S NOT ME!!
THAT'S - IT'S -

Logan stops, shaking, trying to control himself, but a loud sob rises up from deep inside him, and to his and Sammy's horror, he starts to cry.

LOGAN (CONT'D)
Goddamn it, goddamn...

Logan sits on the floor, his back against the lockers, cradling his head, crying. Sammy stares at him, flummoxed.

SAMMY
Jesus, it wasn't supposed to make you... upset. I didn't mean to freak you out, I didn't mean to -

LOGAN
Who cares what you *meant*?

CHAD (O.S.)
FABELMAN!!

Sammy and Logan turn to see Chad charging towards them. Logan hurriedly wipes his eyes and starts to stand.

SAMMY
Oh shit.

CHAD
YOU LIAR, YOU BACKSTABBING *LIAR*!!
I'M GONNA BEAT YOUR GOD -!!

Chad lunges at Sammy; he's stopped, mid-lunge, by Logan, who grabs his jacket, violently pulls him back, then punches Chad in the face, slamming him into the lockers and down to the floor. Chad lies there, blinking, nose and mouth bleeding, unable to move; Logan stands over him, fists at the ready. Chad pushes himself into a sitting position and spits a big gob of red in Sammy's direction.

CHAD (CONT'D)
(to Logan:)
You totally bought it. His whole snow job, you ate it up. You moron.

Logan hauls him to his feet by his jacket.

CHAD (CONT'D)
Logan, you are so conceited and dumb.

Logan spins Chad 180 degrees and kicks him, hard, sending him to his knees. Chad crawls away on all fours till he's a safe distance from Logan. Then he scrambles to his feet and staggers, fast he can, down the hall; he rounds the corner and he's gone.

Logan turns around, breathing hard, still in a fighting mood. Sammy, alarmed, asks, very very nervously:

SAMMY

Is something about to happen?

LOGAN

You like living dangerously,
Fabelman.

SAMMY

No I don't, I really, really don't-

LOGAN

Yes you do. But you tell anybody
about me getting, um, upset? That
would be a mistake.

Sammy nods.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Our secret, OK?

SAMMY

Definitely.

Logan starts away and Sammy, smiling, can't resist -

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Unless I make a movie about it.

Logan's face hardens and he turns back, scary.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Which I'm never ever gonna do.

A beat, then Logan grins and takes a joint and a cigarette lighter out of his jacket pocket. He lights up, takes a toke, then holds the joint out to Sammy. Sammy hesitates, then takes it. He looks at it suspiciously. Logan laughs.

LOGAN

You never...?

SAMMY

What's it like?

LOGAN

It kinda shows you how outta control everything is, and how you're not in charge of anything, and how it doesn't matter.

Sammy waits a second, looking at Logan.

SAMMY

I better not.
(shrugging:)
In my head everything's already out of control.

Logan gives Sammy an appraising look.

LOGAN

You're fulla shit.

Sam snorts a laugh. Logan takes back the joint.

LOGAN (CONT'D)

I gotta split. Claudia's waiting for me.

Smoking, Logan walks down the hall. Then he turns:

LOGAN (CONT'D)

Life's nothing like the movies, Fabelman.

SAMMY

Maybe not. But, hey, in the end? You got the girl.

Logan gives Sammy the finger. Sammy returns the gesture. Logan turns and, rounding the corner, disappears.

Sammy's alone. He sits on the floor heavily, baffled, excited, sad, overwhelmed.

136

INT. THE FABELMAN KITCHEN - DAWN

136

Sammy enters the kitchen, still in his prom clothes. Mitzi is at the stove, cooking breakfast.

MITZI

Must've been some night.

Sammy shrugs.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Did Monica like the corsage?

SAMMY

Yup.

MITZI

Yeah, I told you she would.

Mitzi goes back to the stove to resume cooking, but before she does she turns and says to him:

MITZI (CONT'D)

That time when I hit you.

Sammy looks confused.

MITZI (CONT'D)

In Phoenix, when I - oh God, you remember.

SAMMY

(pretending not to remember:)

Not really -

MITZI

Oh for the love of God, it's not like I spent my whole life hitting you! *Once* I hit you! *Once!!* It shoulda been memorable!

SAMMY

Before the swimming test.

MITZI

Yes! Before the swimming test. Yes! I, I slapped you on your back, as hard as I could, I screwed up your tryout and you couldn't get your merit badge and then you couldn't make Eagle Scout and -

SAMMY

Mom, I made Eagle Scout, it wasn't a big deal -

MITZI (CONT'D)

It left a goddamn mark on your skin in the shape of my hand!!

MITZI (CONT'D)

And I need you to say you forgive me for doing that.

SAMMY

Oh, okay, I forgive you-

MITZI

Because, because you're my kid -

SAMMY
 Mom, I forgive you.
 (embarrassed, then
 gentle, sincere)
 I forgive you. I forgive you.

MITZI (CONT'D)
 - and, and my kids mean more
 to me than anything else on
 the earth to me, because -

MITZI (CONT'D)
 - please, because -
 (she starts to cry:)
*Because how am I ever gonna forgive
 myself? I can't.*

Sammy puts his arms around her and hugs her tightly.

SAMMY
 Mom, I, I... I forgive you.

She wraps her arms around him, crying. They hold each other.
 Behind them, the salami and eggs start to burn.

SAMMY (CONT'D)
 The eggs are burning.

Mitzi goes to the stove and turns the burner off. She faces
 Sammy, leaning against the oven.

MITZI
 I'm doing this thing, and I don't
 know if it's the right thing, but
 it's a life-and-death thing for me.
 And I'm sorry but everybody else is
 gonna have to hang on for dear
 life, and somehow we will survive
 this, all of us, even your father
 who I adore with all my heart, he
 deserves so much better than what
 I'm doing - But Bennie needs me,
 Dolly, and *I need him*, so much so
 that without him I'm turning into
 someone I don't know, and none of
 you will know me anymore, I'll just
 be that hateful person who did that
 terrible thing to your back. And
 yes, this is the most selfish thing
 I have ever done, but I've gotta do
 this now because, Sammy - You do
 what your heart says you have to.
 Because you don't owe anyone your
 life - not even me.

After a quiet moment, she turns away. Focuses on the eggs.

MITZI (CONT'D)

Oh, are they ruined? I can make some more.

SAMMY

Oh, no no no. I like 'em burnt.
(he goes to the drawer for a fork:)
So Monica dumped me.

MITZI

She *did*?

SAMMY

Yeah, after I told her about the divorce.

MITZI

Huh?

SAMMY

Probably shouldn't've asked her to marry me.

MITZI

You did not.

SAMMY

All but.

MITZI

Oh, you *did*!?!?!?

Sammy can't help but laugh as Mitzi slices more salami.

SAMMY

In so many words.

MITZI

Poor girl!

OVER WHITE

SCREEN TITLE: **ONE YEAR LATER**

SCREEN TITLE: **LOS ANGELES**

137

EXT. BURT'S APARTMENT BUILDING, BRENTWOOD, CA - AFTERNOON 137

The sun's molten hot. The street's lined with palm trees. Sammy's beat-up Le Mans pulls up to an apartment building. Sammy, now 18, gets out, burdened, harried. His hair's

longer. He wears a loose necktie and sports jacket. Under his arm he's carrying the trades.

He marches grimly into the building.

138

INT. BURT'S APARTMENT, BRENTWOOD - LATE AFTERNOON

138

It's a small two bedroom apartment, sparsely decorated but neat. Sammy comes in the front door. He's breathing hard, in shallow gasps. He's having a panic attack.

SAMMY

Dad?

(gasping:)

Hey dad, I'm....

(gasping:)

... home.

He throws the trade papers on the floor, tears off the jacket and the necktie, then runs to the kitchen sink, turns on the cold water and sticks his whole head in the sink. This doesn't help his breathing. Gasping, coughing.

BURT (O.S.)

Sammy?

Burt walks in, carrying the mail and a small white bag.

SAMMY

I think I'm having a heart attack.

Burt puts down the mail and the bag immediately and joins Sammy in the kitchen. He shuts off the faucet, puts his head to Sammy's chest and listens, then:

BURT

It's a panic attack. Your mom gets them.

SAMMY

What did you do when she...?

BURT

I made her tea.

SAMMY

Okay...

He goes to the little gallery kitchen. Sammy slumps in the kitchen doorway. As Burt lights the burner under the kettle:

BURT

Plus you're exhausted. You don't sleep, I hear you walking around all night, or typing those letters. And the three hours drive to the college every day and back -

SAMMY

Oh no, no. I can't go back to that dorm.

BURT

Maybe your roommate's settled down?

SAMMY

He voted for Goldwater! I can't go back.

(collecting himself)

Dad. I don't know...what to do anymore. I don't want to disappoint you and I promised that I'd stick it out, but *two years* is like forever, and I hate school, like, a lot, and...I want to get work!

The kettle starts whistling. As Burt fixes a cup of tea:

SAMMY (CONT'D)

On a movie or a TV show, so I send out all those letters but nobody ever writes back and, my life, is just going by so fast, but it's not getting anywhere!

Sammy's starting to panic again. Burt puts the tea on the table. As Sammy gets up off the floor:

BURT

Concentrate on sipping. It'll calm you down.

Sammy sips. Burt drapes his discarded jacket on the chair back.

BURT (CONT'D)

Here, uh, you can go through the mail while I get the soup on.

Burt picks up the bag and the mail; he hands the mail to Sammy, then goes into the kitchen. Sammy starts sorting through the mail, then stops and tears open an envelope. Inside, folded in stationery, are several photographs. Sammy looks at them.

SAMMY

It's from mom, it's just a bunch of goofy photos from some kinda block party.

Burt comes over. Sammy hands him the photos. Burt, smiling, looks at the photos, stopping on one which he scrutinizes for several beats. Sammy watches as Burt's features collapse, pulled down by weighty sadness; he ages visibly. Burt stares just over the top of the photo for a long moment, then he hands the photos back to Sammy. As Sammy takes them he sees Burt's hand is shaking slightly. Burt picks up the rest of the mail and goes into the kitchen. Sammy looks at the photograph Burt was scrutinizing, then he looks back up at Burt, whose back is turned to Sammy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Dad? Dad, what's - ?

Sammy doesn't know what to do. He looks again at the photograph:

Reggie, Natalie and Lisa are smiling for the camera. But in the background, Bennie is at a grill, in an oversized chef's toque; Mitzi stands next to him, handing him a lobster for grilling. They're looking at each other, very happy.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Ah, Dad, I didn't mean to -

Sammy looks up at his dad, who is now sorting through the rest of the mail. Then, without turning to face Sammy, Burt clears his throat and says, in a hoarse voice:

BURT

If you hate school so much, don't go.

SAMMY

But... Dad, we -

BURT

I don't know, I would like you to, because this film thing, I don't know. Maybe I should've put my foot down about it, years ago. But...

Burt picks up the mail and turns to face Sammy. Burt walks towards the table.

BURT (CONT'D)

I know you're going to work like the dickens on whatever you wind up doing, because you're a chip off

the old block.
 (Love and grief rise up,
 he can't speak. Then:)
 We're never not going to know each
 other, Sammy.

SAMMY

How do you know that? You and mom
 don't anymore.

BURT

Yes we do. We always will. I know
 it because...
 (shrugs)
 We've gone too far in our story to
 actually say the end.

Burt takes an envelope from the pack of mail, holds it out to
 Sammy.

BURT (CONT'D)

You missed something in the mail.

Sammy hesitates, looking at his dad. Burt grins slightly.
 Sammy takes the envelope. On the front: **SAM FABELMAN, 4900
 BARRINGTON AVE #304, BRENTWOOD, CA 90049.**

Sammy turns the envelope over. On the back, a letterhead:
ALFRAN PRODUCTIONS. Above the letterhead, the **CBS EYE LOGO.**

Sammy tears the envelope open, yanks out the letter and reads
 voraciously, his eyes widening.

BURT (CONT'D)

Good news?

Sammy looks up at Burt.

BERNIE FEIN (V.O.)

They've ordered *thirty-two* half
 hours.

140

INT. BERNIE FEIN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

140

Crawling over a bulletin board where several headshots are
 pinned above hand-written labels for various roles: "LEBEAU"
 "HOGAN". Widening out reveals several other head shots,
 labels, location photos, etc...

BERNIE FEIN (O.S.)

Fridays at 8:30 pm on CBS starting
 September 17th. We already have *six*
 shows in the can.

BERNIE FEIN, a round, balding, bustling actor/producer shows Sammy, in a jacket and tie, set designs and storyboards for a show he's making featuring American POWs and German soldiers.

BERNIE FEIN (CONT'D)

It's like *Stalag 17* or *The Great Escape*, except it's funnier.

SAMMY

Hmm.

BERNIE FEIN

And it's for television. And it's funny.

SAMMY

Yeah.

BERNIE FEIN

Or at least I pray to God that it's funny.

(showing off a mock-up sketch)

Hogan's Heroes. That's the title? What do ya think? Pretty catchy, right?

SAMMY

Catchy... Yeah...

BERNIE FEIN

And if all goes well, I might be able to offer you something next season.

(gesturing, have a seat)

Maybe assisting an assistant to an assistant.

Sammy sits, nods, crestfallen.

BERNIE FEIN (CONT'D)

You don't want to be in TV anyway. Your letter said as much.

(he picks it up from his desk to peruse)

By the way, I love this letter. I used to write a whole bunch of these letters when I was your age. You wanna make movies. Am I right?

SAMMY

Yeah. Yes, I do! Look, I'm just happy to *start*, anywhere, and that doesn't -

BERNIE FEIN
(snapping his fingers!)
You know who you need to meet?! I
mean not for a job, 'cause...he
doesn't do that. How would you like
to meet the greatest film director
who ever lived and he's right
across the hall?!

141 INT. A CORRIDOR AND AN OFFICE, LOS ANGELES - DAY

141

Bernie Fein leads Sammy out of his office to an office
directly across the hall. As he's opening the door:

BERNIE FEIN
C'mon. Wait here a minute.

Bernie goes in. Sammy looks at the office door's plastic
sign: "SUITE 3B." Bernie's voice can be heard from within.

Bernie comes out and leads Sammy in.

Sammy nervously enters an old, shabby waiting room. NONA, a
secretary, 50ish, dressed in 1940s style, sits behind a desk.

BERNIE FEIN (CONT'D)
Uh, this is Nona. Nona's gonna look
after you. Um, he's not here. He's -

NONA
He's at lunch.

BERNIE FEIN
Right.

NONA
(to Sammy:)
You want to wait?

BERNIE FEIN
Yeah, he'll wait.
(to Sammy:)
Sit.

Bernie guides Sammy to a chair and slaps him on the shoulder.

BERNIE FEIN (CONT'D)
Good luck.

Bernie leaves.

NONA
Could be hours.

Sammy nods. Nona goes back to work. Sammy looks at the old posters on the walls (the strumming guitar of *The Searchers* score commences in his head): STAGECOACH, HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY, THE INFORMER, THE SEARCHERS, 3 GODFATHERS, SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON, THE GRAPES OF WRATH, THE QUIET MAN, and a newer poster for LIBERTY VALENCE.

The door of the office flies open, *The Searchers* score ends with the sound of a needle scraped off a record, and JOHN FORD enters. He's 71 but he looks older, tall, gaunt, an eyepatch over one eye, covering his glasses on that side. He's wearing beat-up safari clothes and a cloth safari hat. He's holding a partly burned, unlit cigar, the mouth-end badly masticated. As he walks past Sammy, oblivious, Sammy sees that there are perfectly-shaped lipstick kisses on Ford's cheeks and in the middle of his forehead. He goes past Nona, enters his office and slams the door. Nona picks up a box of Kleenex and runs in after him.

Sammy waits. Nona emerges with a wad of pink-stained wet Kleenex. She dumps it in her desk trashcan and says, indicating the partially-opened inner office door:

NONA (CONT'D)

Alright kid, you got five minutes.
Probably one. Stand up.

Sammy stands.

NONA (CONT'D)

Lose the tie. You'll stand a better
chance.

Sammy nervously removes his tie.

142

CUT TO: 142

John Ford is at his desk, snipping the end from a fresh cigar with a tarnished silver clipper. Sammy enters and stands before the great man, awestruck.

Ford reaches retrieves a match from a small brass holder shaped like a cowboy boot, strikes it on his desk blotter, lights the cigar and puffs again and again. It goes on and on, but Sammy drinks this in, not moving a muscle. Ford takes the cigar out and licks his lips, his tongue weirdly distended, like a cat's. Then:

JOHN FORD

They tell me you want to be a
picture maker.

SAMMY

Um, yes sir. I do.

JOHN FORD
Why?! This business -
(he shreds the air!)
- it'll rip you apart!

SAMMY
Well, Mr. Ford, I -

JOHN FORD
So whatta ya know about art, kid?

SAMMY
I just- I love your movies so much -

JOHN FORD
NO! ART!!

Ford suddenly points to a big Remington painting, two men on horseback looking off into the distance with a large butte in the background.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
See that painting over there?!

SAMMY
Uh, yeah, I mean yes! Yes, I do see it.

JOHN FORD
Walk over to it!

Sammy walks to the painting. He looks at it, unsure about what he's supposed to do.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Well?! What's in it?! Describe it!!

SAMMY
Oh okay, um - so there are...two guys, and they're...on horseback and they're looking for something, so maybe they're scouting - ?

JOHN FORD
NO!! NO!! Where's the horizon?!

SAMMY
The - the horizon?

JOHN FORD
Where is it?!

SAMMY

(pointing:)

Oh, it's, um, it's at the bottom.

JOHN FORD

That's RIGHT! Walk over to this painting!

He points at another painting, a Western scene by Charles Russell. Sammy examines it: five cowboys in a large, crater-like ditch. Their horses are tethered by a small pool of water at the center of the depression while the men are all hunkered around the ridge, rifles ready, forming an armed perimeter.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Well?!

SAMMY

Right, okay, so there are five cowboys, you know, they -

JOHN FORD

(in a RAGE:)

NO NO NO NO NO!!! WHERE'S THE GODDAMNED HORIZON!!!!!!????

SAMMY

(flustered, pointing to the top of the painting:)

Um, it's there!

JOHN FORD

WHERE?!?!?

SAMMY

AT THE TOP OF THE PAINTING!

JOHN FORD

ALRIGHT GET OVER HERE!

Sammy obeys, walking to Ford's desk.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Now remember this! When the horizon's at the bottom, it's interesting. When the horizon's at the top, it's interesting. When the horizon's in the middle, it's boring as shit!! Now good luck to you -

Sammy smiles.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
- and GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY
OFFICE!!

Sammy rushes out the open door. After a moment, he peeks his head back in.

SAMMY
Thank you!

JOHN FORD
My pleasure.

143

EXT. PARAMOUNT PICTURES STUDIOS - AFTERNOON

143

Sammy emerges onto an empty studio street, bordered on each side by the huge semicircles of the soundstages. Sammy is stunned, happy, taking in what's happened. He looks back up to the third floor of the small office building, then ahead. Sammy walks down the street, happy with the world. He keeps walking, getting smaller and smaller.

The camera adjusts to move the horizon from the middle to the bottom of the frame.

END OF FILM

ROLL CREDITS